The Sooners

A Romance of Early Oklahoma

By

Roderic Horton

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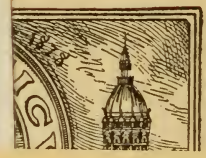

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"Man and Horse Seemed to be Surcharged With the Same Vital Fluid . . . Human and Animal Alike Were Imbued With the Hot Sense of Expectancy That Within a Few Minutes Their Energies Would Be Given the Desired License." [*Page 54*]

THE SOONERS

A Romance of Early Oklahoma

BY

RODERIC HORTON

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ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

THE FRONTIER NOVITIATE

THE west-bound Sunset Express, composed of box cars, day coaches and Pullmans, rounded the curve leading into Kanokla, a frontier town on the border between the state of Kansas and the Cherokee Strip, on a blistering August day. The train was in two sections, and as the locomotive of the first unit blew its siren announcement heralding the train's approach, a vast contingent of the people gravitated toward the crude, inadequate little station. So dense was the formation on either side of the track that the engineer was compelled to move his train with extreme caution through the avenue of crowding, jostling humanity attracted to the depot. Some were there in the expectancy of meeting relatives and friends, though a larger number through idle curiosity.

The train was loaded to the car roofs, every available seat and aisle being occupied and the platforms overflowing to the danger point.

The line of cars stopped with creaks and groans; the engine's air pump beat violently like the heart of an animate thing exhausted from dragging its human load that now emptied itself from every exit. Out of the side doors of box cars and from the roofs and from the platforms of the coaches flowed the human tide as if it would be never ending.

Men in shirt sleeves and sweltering leaped over each other in their avidity to leave the jammed and suffocating cars. Strong-armed fathers carried children aloft to save them from being trampled under-

foot. Men uttered imprecations licentiously; women fainted and children screamed. Husbands dragged their wives out into the open prairie where they left them shaded with their coats while they ran to a nearby river for a hatful of water.

The passengers were representative of thousands who had preceded them to the border—representative of every phase of humanity from every corner of the nation.

It was when the West was in the making—a West that demanded and produced a race of rugged homemakers. It was the West of yesterday.

To be concrete, it was in the year 1893. Oklahoma Territory at that time consisted of but a few counties surrounding the capital city of Guthrie. The Cherokee Strip, the Kiowa and Comanche reservations, the land of the Five Civilized Tribes of the then Indian Territory, all have since been added to what is now the teeming state of Oklahoma. It was still within that eon wherein the bitterness of the Civil War lingered—sentimentally much of the South had as yet to be reconstructed.

Jack Morrison was among the number to alight from the train. Dominant with all the energies of a young man in the early twenties, he edged his way through the crowd. On his left arm he carried his coat, while with his right hand he lugged an overloaded grip. His derby hat was tilted back on his head, revealing penetrating, shrewd, grey orbs, and his shirt sleeves were rolled to the elbows.

It was with happy anticipation that Jack Morrison had come to the border to take part in the opening of the Cherokee Strip. But a few weeks previous he

had left his position as traveling salesman for Moses Benson & Company, out of Kansas City, Kansas, as a result of a reprimand he had received from his manager. The young man, who had previously been successful in that line, had been sent into new territory in the Arkansas Ozarks. In the obscure little town of Mount Zion, while waiting in the postoffice for the mail to be distributed, he obtrusively approached an attractive mountain maid and sought an acquaintance. He was unaware that his seeming aggressiveness was a violation of the code of the region, and before finishing his business in the place, he was waited on by a friendly native and advised to leave the vicinity at once ere the irate mountaineer brother of the girl, with a number of others of his ilk, would give him rough treatment.

He did leave, just in time. But news of the affair, somehow, reached the ears of Moses Benson himself. On his return from the trip Jack was girdingly catechized by his employer, accompanied with threats of dismissal should he ever repeat the supposed offence. But the news of the coming Cherokee opening had already reached his ears. What was the salary of a drummer compared to the opportunies that would be thrown open in the new Land of Promise? "To hell with Moses Benson & Company," he muttered to himself, and to the surprise of his manager, he was quick to take advantage of the reprimand as an excuse to sever his connection.

Jack was soon out in the open street of Kanokla, and then looked up and down at the rows of one- and two-story frame buildings, their fronts sheltered from the elements by corrugated iron or board awnings.

Heat radiated in visible air waves from the road. From off the prairie and down the thoroughfare came a small, funnel-shaped cloud of sand—a miniature whirlwind that sucked up the dust in its path and twisted it about on a tangent. The infant cyclone struck Morrison and moved on, covering his moistened, boyish features with grime. The tiny breeze, nevertheless, was greatly appreciated by the newcomer, so torrid was the day. He removed his hat and mopped his face with his already much-soiled handkerchief.

Prohibition had been the law in Kansas for many years, but it had as yet to develop the force that it obtained in later days. In the process of this development Kanokla had been overlooked. It would require too much effort on the part of the state and county officials to give the letter of the law strict enforcement, with the thousands of the rag-tag and bobtail of humanity pouring into the town every day from all quarters of the nation. Officialdom, temporarily, centered its efforts in keeping gun plays down to the minimum; otherwise, it turned its back.

After having ridden for hours in an oven-like coach, Jack's tongue clung to the roof of his mouth and he inquisitively looked up and down the street for a sign of the foaming goblet. "Anheuser-Busch" he made out in gold letters on a metal shield that adorned the corner of a frame building a block away.

"Me for a cool bottle the first thing," he remarked to one near by, and strode rapidly in the direction of the saloon.

The bar was crowded. It was with difficulty that Jack reached over many heads and caught the eye of

the bar clerk who handed him a pint bottle of malted liquid in exchange for a twenty-five cent piece.

Jack had gulped down about half of the bottle of beverage when the crack of several pistol shots up the street caused him to pause and interrogate a bystander as to the meaning of the fusillade.

The reply came from one apparently inured to life on the border, as he, with no apparent concern, replied:

"Oh, it's jus' some th' boys a-shootin' up the town, I reckon."

The new arrivals in the crowd moved toward the door, Jack carried with them. Curiosity knew no danger. Once outside, he leaned relaxingly against an awning post.

Down the street, their steeds stirring up a cloud of dust that nearly obscured them, appeared a half-dozen drunken cattlemen. Their weird yells and pistol shots ripped the air.

There were a few fearless people, born and bred on the frontier, who remained in the open, but a vast majority sought cover. The cowmen's shots, so far, had been directed skyward.

Jack was deserted by all but a little knot of men as the cowboys neared the saloon. Their antics amused, more than frightened him. But be that as it may, he held like a barnacle to the awning post.

In front of the saloon the cattlemen halted. One drove dangerously near to Jack and sized him up from head to foot, then burst into derisive laughter. The merriment of the cowmen temporarily removed the sense of fear that had come over the youth after he had thought of bolting for the door.

The plainsman turned about in his saddle and vaned his index finger at Jack.

"Say, Tunk; kin yer bullseye that lid?" he asked of a comrade.

While the Kansan was fearfully cogitating on what was going to happen, there was a "pin-n-g," and the derby hat fell to the sidewalk. Jack picked up his headgear and with rapid working mentality endeavoring to decide whether to hold up both hands or run, he noticed a bullet hole in the top of it. The cowboys were roaring gleefully. He saw Whiskey Tunk shoving the smoking pistol back into its sheath and felt relieved.

"Good shot, Tunk"; bellowed Wall-eyed Kaintuck, another of the gang. "Read ther law t' him."

Jack remained statuesque while he held the perforated hat in his hand. Whiskey Tunk alighted from his horse and approached the Kansan, a devilish gleam in his eyes. Long, black hair hung over his shoulders. His face was bronzed by the hot winds of many summers, above which a slouch hat rolled back from his eyebrows. He was one of the supermen of the region.

His spurs rattling uncanny on the sidewalk, Whiskey Tunk approached Jack and unceremoniously snatched the derby from the young man's hand. The hat went into the air and a half-dozen shots from as many pistols made it a sieve before it gravitated to the earth.

Whiskey Tunk, his arms akimbo, laughed a scornful laugh at the intimidated Kansan.

"'Scuse me, pard," he spoke, "but it's ag'in th' law o' these parts fer a feller to wear one o' them new-

fangled, high-falutin' lids. Won't yer come inside an' have a leetle red-eye?"

Jack was too frightened to do anything but accept the invitation.

With fiendish whoops and yells, accompanied by another volley from their guns, the remaining cattlemen dismounted. Whiskey Tunk, dragging Jack by the hand, led the rush through the front entrance of the saloon. The entree was the signal for a hasty departure of other occupants through the rear door. A few remained.

The young Kansan was pushed without ceremony up to the bar.

"Give everybody a drink," commanded Whiskey Tunk, in tones roaring and menacing. The healths of several were drunk, and in between, at times, Jack attempted to leave the crowd of cattlemen, only to be dragged back into the saloon again in spite of his protestations. Then Whiskey Tunk became inquisitive in regard to his business and what he intended to do in "these parts."

"You see, it's this way," enunciated Jack: "This outfit in power in Washington has made such a failure of things that times are hard in the cities—so hard that many people have been driven from there to the country."

Tunk was listening attentively while the speaker paused to take another sup of beer.

"They are always on the wrong side," he continued, in the way of a provincial, intense partisan,—"have been since the beginning of the Civil war, you understand. They started out to disrupt the country with secession, and now they're wrecking business.

If it wasn't for the damned Solid South they never—"

Out from the crowd leaped a middle-aged man with an unusual broad rim on his hat. The character was lean, muscular and with a cadaverous face. His shirt was unbuttoned in front half way down his breast. A red bandana handkerchief hung loosely from his neck, forming a bib in front. His boots were short-topped and heavier than the ordinary as they scraped up the sawdust on the floor.

The man faced Jack, leaned forward and doubled up his fist. His eyes shot forth scintillating shafts of anger like lightning from the maddened heavens as he looked down upon the youth.

"What's that rema'k yo'-all made about th' South, suh?" he asked.

Jack realized that he must decide the issue at once. To retract what he had said would be a confession of weakness—ethics that had no place in the border code. He had been taking his first lessons in the rigid school of the frontier, and he was now convinced that any retreat from the position he had already assumed, however indiscreet it may have been, would mean the loss of caste in the motley crowd that surrounded him. At first he edged along the bar, but the menacing figure followed him. Presently, he looked up into the fellow's face, his own fists clenched. He picked up the gauntlet by saying:

"Yes, I said if it wasn't for the damned Solid South—"

In more refined communities the doubled-up fist of the wiry young Kansan might have delivered a telling uppercut on the jowl that towered above him; but in an instant the border man drew his gun. The

eyes of the man were bloodshot with rage. The bartenders ducked and several of the occupants of the place scrambled for the doors. Jack turned white and his hands were about to ascend when a piece of metal was shoved over his shoulder from behind. The long, shining barrel grazed his ear as it was pointed at the breast of his would-be slayer.

"Drop that gun, hang you!" bellowed a voice at the Kansan's back.

The gun dropped to the floor from its owner's hand as if it were red hot. A cowman picked up the weapon and laid it on the bar.

Jack now felt safe to turn about, and in doing so, beheld Whiskey Tunk, pistol in hand, still having the drop on the threatening one who sulkingly held up both hands.

Whiskey Tunk had been quick to realize that Jack was unarmed, and an attack with a shooting iron on a defenseless person was a violation of the *lex non scripta* of the region—a law that Tunk was willing to take upon himself to enforce.

"That's the secunt time, Tex, that yer tried t' git th' drop on a defenseless tenderfoot," he said, complacently putting his gun back into the holster. "Now th' nex' time I ketch yer doin' that I'll fill yer so full o' holes that a coyote will pass yer up fer a good meal."

Whiskey Tunk reached forward, picked up Tex's revolver and returned it to him. The Texan shoved it down into its scabbard. Tunk then fearlessly placed his hand on Tex's shoulder, and in warning words said:

"Now then, damn yer, be a man arter this if yer expect to drink in th' same joint with this hyar crowd."

Tex's countenance advertised a curious mixture of sheepishness and ugliness.

"Let's have some more red-eye all around," suggested Tunk—a suggestion that was acted on immediately.

Thus the shaggy-eyed, heavy-maned man from No Man's land acted as judge, jury and sheriff in a cause involving a violation of a law of the frontier. His decision was final.

The cowmen, through with their bacchanalian orgie in the saloon, departed on their pintos, and as they made their way loping westward from the outskirts of the town their wild whoops could be heard echoing over the prairie.

Jack Morrison, with bare blonde head, was about to leave the saloon in search for a store where he might purchase a hat to take the place of the one riddled with bullets and trampled under horses' hoofs. It occurred to him that he had brought a grip when he had entered the place of convivality—he remembered distinctly having left it beside an unoccupied card table. He searched in and around every table in the place. He thrust his head out through the rear entrance and scanned the interior of the stockade. He peered behind the bar. No semblance of his luggage or any other luggage could be found.

At last he inquired of a bar clerk. The employe, with an expression of innocence that befitted a lamb, insisted that he had no knowledge, whatever, of Jack's baggage, then turned about and winked knowingly at an assistant who returned a sinister smile.

Jack's fingers combed his blonde hair made moist by perspiration as he pondered over the disappearance

of his grip. At last a light dawned upon him. He said nothing, but reached into the inner pocket of his coat for his long, fat purse. It was still there, as well as the loose change in his trousers pocket. His watch and chain were missing.

Jack walked out onto the street, his head bent forward in a musing attitude. The experience was one of the many lessons taught him during the day in the rugged school of the border—a school in which the sombrero purchased by him later in the afternoon marked him as a freshman.

Shrewd, and with an active commercial mind, he was yet a novitiate in the ways of the frontier. But he was in that plastic age that is always quick to adjust itself to any condition and environment.

During the day Jack strolled leisurely about the streets of Kanokla, his rapid mentality taking in every angle of the situation, tenderfoot as he was, but with equal rapidity he was making his plans for his future actions. In the metamorphosis that was going on, little did the subject dream that the process was making a character of him that would figure so prominently in the later history of the territory of Oklahoma. Little did he realize that still later, in the many transitions to follow, environments and associations would change his career, and that finally from an unexpected source would come one who would remould his life and character entirely.

As he stood on the border between the Cherokee Strip and the state of Kansas that afternoon, a border guarded heavily by indifferent acting men in the blue uniform of the United States Army, he gazed covetously over the broad expanse of yellow, billowed prairie

before him to the Southward. Off yonder lay thousands of acres of undeveloped wealth that seemed to beckon to youth and red blood such as Jack Morrison possessed. While he dreamed of a great future for the new country that was to be opened within two weeks, there was nothing cinematographed on his mind that would indicate the great part he was to play in the development of this new country—there was nothing in the cards that showed, as yet, the great outstanding role he was to play in the making of a state. In the new country soon to be flooded with people from every corner of the Republic, bringing with them their provincialisms and their prejudices that were bound to clash with each other in the great, seething melting pot, many thrilling episodes were to be enacted in which Jack Morrison at this time little imagined he would have a part, let alone eventually transform his whole life as well as make him an outstanding figure. As he stood with his toes touching the Land of Promise, his thoughts were only of the material things to be gained over there after the Strip should be opened up—his was a materialistic mind, as yet, pliable to only materialistic things, little realizing that in the great career before him he would undergo a change.

CHAPTER II

THE MOUNTAIN MAID'S DREAM

TO Laura De Forrest, daughter of Colonel Johnson De Forrest, the coming great Cherokee opening meant something of the mysterious beyond—new hopes and new dreams of the future. Neither she, nor her brother Beauregard De Forrest, had ever been beyond the hills that surrounded the valley in which nestled the little community of Mount Zion in the Arkansas Ozarks, and their breadth of vision was correspondingly circumscribed. Unlike her mountaineer brother, she inherited much of the vivaciousness of her departed Creole mother, though much of her activity of mind and body was kept in due bounds by the lady-like training given her by her parent now dead. In her crude environment she was an aristocrat; she dressed well as the girls of that obscure locality dressed, which, added to her natural beauty and amiable disposition, made her a queen among the younger people in that community. She cared little for the social side of life, but the home appealed to Laura more, devoted as she was to her aged father and her brother.

But she dreamed of the Great Over Yonder—of the outer world that existed outside of the range of hills—the railroads and "kivered" cars; the great cities of activity and bright lights, the fairy-like stories which she had read or heard recited. Even the sun, as it disappeared like a huge disc of gold behind the western mountain ridge that evening, seemingly beckoned to her:

"Follow me."

So immaculate in mind and body was she, it did not occur to her that in the homeliness of her pristine surroundings she was far removed from the pitfalls and tragedies of the great world of human weakness.

This irrepressible longing within her had been accelerated but a few weeks previous. While she was at the only store, or "commissary" as it was regionally called, in which was located the postoffice, one evening, waiting for the daily mail to be distributed, she came in contact with one of the few traveling salesmen who made that region. He was a young, dapper, well-dressed fellow, with blonde hair and alert, gray eyes. The vivacity of the fellow was contradictory to the slow-going mountaineers who lounged about the store, some of the grown-ups in their bare feet, who eyed the stranger in a half suspicious manner. To her there was something unusually attractive about the fellow—something that she could not resist, despite her otherwise natural reserve when coming in contact with strangers. Dark, entrancing, Creole eyes unwittingly met the gray ones in an exchange of glances, and before she could realize what she had done, the drummer stepped brusquely forward and, after salaaming politely, removed his hat and turned loose a verbal battery of blandiloquence for which he was noted. Being unused to such aggressiveness, she blushed, retreated a step or two and to his surprise darted out the door of the store. The stranger did did not realize that his bit of impulsiveness was a violation of the code of the regions, until he was waited upon by the mountaineers present, including a brother of the girl, and notified that the best thing he could do would be to leave the locality at once, which he did.

But after that, time and again, Laura De Forrest left the vine-covered veranda of her home to skip to the gate when a west-bound prairie schooner was passing by, bearing friends of many years acquaintance. She envied them; theirs was a blessed privilege that she, so far, could not hope for. All the De Forrest family possessed in the world was the little patch of ground and their home. Prior to the Civil War, Colonel Johnson De Forrest had been one of the moderately well-to-do planters of the South, but Yankee hordes had swept over the country while the strife was at its height, wrecking the fortunes of the colonel along with thousands of other Southerners, and leaving a bitterness against everything Northern that was slow in passing.

Their present home was the scene of Laura's many blithesome childhood days; it contained the grave of her departed mother, and she felt herself clamped in the vortex of a great strife between the dazzling phantasies of the future and the past with all of its traditional sentiments. Father, brother, home were sacred; but as she watched the twilight of each departing day she felt something magnetic in the Great Over There, west of the mountains. Nightfall after nightfall, while she sat on the porch, the great solar orb, as it capped the dark green of the Ozark hills with a fringe of gold, seemingly beckoned again:

"Come, follow me."

It happened one evening while one of the canvas-covered wagons drawn by a team of Missouri mules was passing by. The lines were in the hands of a lank individual, who, perched upon a spring seat in front, allowed the animals to have slack rein while he

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spat tobacco juice between their heels. Laura perceived in bold letters on the side of the craft, painted in crude style, the words:

"OKLAHOMY OR BUST"

She felt a deep thrill, and pointing to the lettered canvas, standing out, as it were, boldly in contrast to the gray-green of the hillsides beyond, she exclaimed exultingly:

"Oh, daddy; looka thar!"

"Well, I reckon they'll shore enough bust," her father asserted with confidence, as he continued drawing on his pipe.

"No, no, daddy; they won't, yo' know, 'cause they're goin' t' run fo' some that Injun land."

"I reckon by th' looks of them mules they won't run much of a hickory," pessimistically insisted the old man.

But in the meantime an idea, long in embryo, blossomed forth in the mind of the girl. Her dark eyes lit up with the light of a new life. She looked up into her parent's face imploringly.

"Daddy, what say we-all go to Oklahomy?"

"Nonsense, gal. If I was a young man I reckon I'd want to go; but I'm gittin' right sma't rheumatic. 'Sides we-all are too pooah to go." He shook his head in expostulation.

"I know, daddy; but we'uns are no mo' pooah than some of th' othah folks a-goin," she insisted, as she rested her hand on her parent's shoulder, looked into his eyes, and named several families that had joined the western hegira.

"But, where'll we git th' money, gal? We won't

have any till th' cotton is done picked an' th' openin' will be ovah befo' that time. An' there's th' mo'gage to be lifted from the place."

"Daddy—"

The suggestion Laura was about to advance was an important one to the family. In their provincial way it meant a crisis. It would be a new departure, leaving behind the old in the dead past and venturing into the Unknown.

"Daddy—"

She threw her arm gently about his neck and cheek to cheek whispered into his ear:

"Let's sell th' ol' place an' go to Oklahomy."

The father did not answer. The soiled white of the covered wagon marked it moving westward. He followed it with his dim eyes until it disappeared behind the foothills.

"Daddy," continued the girl, "yo'-all came west from Tennessee an' built a house heah. Why can't we go west to Oklahomy an' build a new home thar?"

The old man began to appreciate his daughter's feelings. True, he was young once himself—a boy back in the mountains of Tennessee, before the war between the states, when the then new West allured him. He was young and his blood ran warm in those days; he feared not the future nor what life's battles had in store for him.

While he was held to the old place by a sentimental attachment, he thought of the future of his children. Perhaps, after all, the West presented opportunities to them such as the narrow little Ozark valley did not afford. He realized that the number of his remaining days on earth were few; he was not in a posi-

tion to help his children any more; on the other hand, in his enfeebled condition he was dependent on them. If he went with them West he might be a detriment to them.

"Well, we-all will see what Gardy thinks about it," he finally acquiesced.

"Beuregard!" he hallooed.

"Yeah, dad; what d'yo' want?"

"Come heah."

"Yeah, I'll be thar directly."

Soon the three were in council. Gardy, to his sister's surprise, was enthusiastic about the proposed migration. The father was the only dissenting one. He was quite obdurate at first, but the will of the children eventually prevailed.

"We ken sell th ol' place, pay off th' mo'gage an' leave soon. It will take some time to drive across th' kentry, an' we bettah pull out befo' many days," suggested Laura, "as th' openin' will come off in Septembah."

"Yeah," drawled Gardy, "an' it won't take long to put a covah on that thar wagon."

Laura's features beamed with enthusiasm. She danced, clapped her hands and her heart beat violently with unbounded glee.

"We're shore goin' to Oklahomy, haint we?" she exclaimed.

Happy were the dreams of Laura De Forrest that night after she had retired—the dreams such as only youth can have. But they failed to picture to her the great part she was to play in the drama of life during the coming few years. They failed to paint a scene of the hardships that the family would have to under-

go in the New Land, as had been the experience of all pioneers of America. She failed to visualize in the phantasies of that night the role she was to play in the years to come in obliterating sectional prejudices and provincial misunderstandings—especially the part she was destined to play in changing the life and character of one man whom she had seen but once. The future years in the territory soon to be opened with all of its thrilling events were in no open book to her in her dreams. She had not the least premonition of what her future life would be, only the picture of an attractive, gray-eyed, well-dressed youth was paramount—it was persistent in her visions of the future. And then there was the great race for land to come off, in which thousands of men and horses were to participate, the great Cherokee Opening—wouldn't that be thrilling?

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH TWO JAYHAWKERS MEET

O YOU'RE from Lawrence, are you? I'm from out Wichita way myself—have for a coupla years been on the road for Moses Benson & Co. out of K. C."

These words were spoken by Jack Morrison to a dark-complexioned, middle-aged man with a poker face whose acquaintance the Kansan had made on the main street of Kanokla a few hours after the episode at the saloon. The two men had encountered as if preordained and the personality of each was such as to be mutually attractive. Edgar Barks, though several years Jack's senior, with his hair slightly bordered above the ears by a stain of silver, had many of the characteristics of the younger man. His eyes sparkled through deep-set brows, shrewd and designing. Smooth of face, his lips were effeminate and disclosed a weak trait somewhere. Both were suave of speech; both were inveterate cigar smokers, but a difference in their traits was the ever-present smile on Jack's features in contrast to Barks' outward and seemingly innocent stolidness. Both considered the world as their game. Society, in the dawn of things, had been evolved as a protection of the weak against the strong; but that was in an age when man was measured by animal strength alone. These two men lived in an era when their superior mental forces were their stock in trade; society had as yet enacted no code that would protect those of less mental activity from their machinations. Likewise, in the country soon to be opened, even the physical laws of man would be lax, for a time

at least. Edgar Barks and John Henry Morrison were materialists; the minutes and seconds of both were measured by dollars and cents. Little wonder, at their first meeting, that each saw in the other a co-worker in a common cause, culminating, as it did, in the pooling of their stock in trade—their mental activities.

"Yes, I'm from Lawrence," answered Barks.

"Lawrence—Lawrence," Jack mused. "Oh, yes, I know now—that town over in the eastern part of the state—destroyed by Quantrell and his guerillas during the war—I've heard my dad tell about it."

At the mention of the irregular rebel's name Barks' features hardened and he almost bit his cigar in two. Removing the weed, he ejaculated:

"Heard tell of it, you say? Well, I've more than heard tell of it. By Gawd, it's I that knows Quantrell." He circled the name with expletives. "I sure knew him personally and it's a wonder I'm alive here to tell you about it."

Barks paused, and blew outward a mouthful of cigar smoke. His eyes narrowed reminiscently, as he continued:

"Well do I remember, though I was but a boy of five, when he and his damned rebels invaded the town. Yes, I sure recollect the burning of Lawrence by him and the slaughter that followed. Yes, I remember when my father left the house just as the attack commenced and was shot down in cold blood. And my mother who went to his side received a bullet in the head. That was all done before my eyes, mind you, and the only thing that likely saved me was the fact that I was a kid. But even at that, had I a gun, I would have taken a shot at them, damn them. Do you think

for a moment that I can forget any scene like that, Morrison? Well, I should say not—I shall never forget it, even if the war has been over thirty years. They can talk about reconstruction and the like, and the reunited country and all that stuff, but rebel is rebel with me."

"And what happened to you after that?" questioned Jack, who was becoming intensely interested.

"Me? Oh, I being left an orphan, was adopted by a neighbor who was very kind to me. But his wife died, and afterward he was arrested for bootlegging whiskey to the Indians down in the Strip and was sent to the pen at Leavenworth. Since then I've been knocked about the world, and it seemed to me that there was no such thing as kindness among people. As I grew older I could see that all the interest people took in me was to use me, and I finally concluded it was me against the world. Such being the case, I'm out to play the game against the world. I love these dear human beings only to get the best of them; I'm in the game to win."

Jack scratched a match on the sole of his shoe and held the burning splinter up to Barks' cigar which had died out.

"Have a light?" Jack proffered, with a friendly glint in his eyes.

"Thank you."

The flame on the match was snuffed and it was thrown to one side.

"Well," spoke up Jack, "I'll admit that I didn't give up my job on the road and come here for my health, myself—I've come here to make a clean-up. By

the way, can you tell me where I can find a good hotel to stop at until the opening?"

"You sure look like a man who could make a clean-up." Barks' eyes glistened in lieu of a laugh. "But as to a hotel, you'll do well if you find a place to camp in the town. I'm living in a pup tent out on the plains. Why, man, they're boiling in here at the rate of thousands a day—by train, wagon and every way possible. There will certainly be a lively scramble for land over in the Strip when the run is made, and if there won't be plenty of shooting I'll miss my guess. That line of blue-coated soldiers over there on the border holds back the biggest pent-up human flood you ever saw, and it's a wonder to me they're able to hold them, they're getting so thick. A few have attempted to sneak over but have been given a dose of lead as a result. Yes, they're here from all over the country—moon-faced Swedes from Minnesota, lone-stars from Texas, lumberjacks from Michigan, college sissies from Yale, Dutchmen from Milwaukee, bad men from No Man's Land,* miners from the Rockies, blue-nosed Yankees from Vermont—the greatest conglomeration you ever heard of."

And then he added, confidentially:

"Many of them are easy picking at cards. But the Strip will be flooded with these blamed Southerners who've forgotten the war is over. But then, I guess, it's an even break—as long as I live I'll never forget Quantrell—so, you see, there's no love lost."

He paused to light a fresh cigar while Jack marvelled at what he had told him.

"Yes," Barks continued, "they're all here—Jew and

[*No Man's Land, so called, was what is now known as the Oklahoma Panhandle, both Texas and Oklahoma, at that time. claiming possession.]

Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, Grand Old Party true-to-the-flag Republican, bewhiskered Kansas Populist and unterrified and unreconstructed Southern Democrat. Each has with him his own ideas and prejudices, and if there won't be the liveliest mixup over in the Strip I'll miss my guess. Yes, as is always the case, there are a lot of blamed fools who came here dead broke and they're going around here where a man with means has a hard time getting anything to eat. No wonder there's been so many hold-ups and shooting affrays."

"Then this must be a tough place."

"You'll think so before you've been here very long. While prohibition is supposedly strong here in Kansas, the booze joints run day and night and gambling is done everywhere, even under the canopy of heaven. Down by the river in the tents you'll find any number of soiled doves, and the only law there seems to be here is the law of the frontier—the law of the quickest with the shooting iron, from whose court there seems to be no appeal."

"Well, that's certainly interesting," assured Jack; "but I must be hunting a place to camp."

The two clasped hands and looked intently into each other's eyes. The mutual telepathic message read: "You look good to me."

"But before you leave," suggested Barks, "I want to present you with something."

Barks withdrew from his pocket a revolver. Placing it in Jack's hand, he remarked:

"You'll need this little piece of hardware if you're going to trail in with me. I see you're unarmed, which is not the best thing in this locality. Take this little

present and keep it; I have another for myself. You couldn't buy one in Kanokla for any money, there is such a demand for them."

Jack studied the weapon.

"Thanks," he gratefully assured Barks, and then:

"I think we can play the game together. You shoot square with me and I will with you." And then the younger man added with a happy glint in his eye:

"Talk about your hoss races—won't that Cherokee Opening be a hummer? I can hardly wait for it when I see so many kinds of animals that are going to be entered."

"Yes," replied Barks, with not quite as much enthusiasm as that shown by the other, "there'll be thousands of them in it, and as a professional gambler, such as I am, it will be difficult for me to place a bet with the great variety of crow-baits in the line-up."

And then with profuse handshakes and good-byes, the pair temporarily separated.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH TO THOSE WHO CROSSED

ACK MORRISON, looking keenly in every direction for the sign of a hotel, beheld a block away a human effervesence as a crowd of people milled back and forth around a team of mules and a wagon that had but turned the corner. On the wagon were perched two men on boxes, and on the rear of the vehicle was a sooty kerosene range.

"Another shooting?" Jack inquired of a stranger leaning against an awning post and smoking a cigaret.

"Nope," came the reply. "I reckon it's the hot sandwich wagon jus' got in."

The crowd, congested about the wagon, precluded any further movement of the team and conveyance.

"Hot sandwich wagon, you say?" inquired the Kansan. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know what th' hot sandwich wagon is, stranger? Well, I reckon you're a tenderfoot in these parts. Th' hot sandwich wagon, my friend, is th' wagon that brings in th' hot pork sandwiches an' coffee for th' starvin' horde that has been dumped here. If you're hungry you'd better rustle an' git a bite as grub's gittin' mighty scarce in this here town."

The desire of Jack to satisfy his inner self was paramount, at this time, to securing a lodging for the night.

The two men on the wagon were busily dealing out sandwiches and coffee to the rabble, the crowd jostling and fighting to get to the vehicle like a pack of wolves over a fallen buck. The hot weather had not been con-

ducive to good dispositions among the famished throng, consequently fists were seen to shoot out among the sea of human faces; men would drop in their tracks to come back with a counter attack; then the crowd would give way for a moment and finally close up again.

The world-old law of the survival of the strongest prevailed; the physically weak were thrust to one side by those of greater brawn. There were men in the masculine drove whose ability had at times turned deals involving thousands in a single hour, but who now found themselves as helpless as infants when it came to obtaining a mouthful to eat. Genius counted for naught; the swarm of hungry beings were men in the beginning of things—men in the primeval. Hunger had cast off the veneer of thousands of years of civilization.

Jack drifted with the crowd to the wagon. The odor of strong coffee floated out over the sea of broad-rimmed hats. He was hungry—desperately hungry. Inhaling the aroma, the gnawing within him was accelerated. His natural desire was for the material things; it was that instinct that brought him to the new country—the insatiable desire—the intensely human desire to gain at the expense of others. Therefore, the human element that separated him from the coveted food was only an obstacle to overcome—an obstacle that one like Jack Morrison, in the red blood of his youth, delighted in overcoming.

Backing away from the crowd in order to give himself impetus, Jack held his hat in his hand, and with a dash forward like a gridiron star bucking the line, negotiated his way through the masculine mass to

within ten feet of the wagon. In doing so, he severely jolted a man beside him who swung his right arm about in a circle and barely grazed the Kansan's ear. The supply of sandwiches was fast disappearing into the myriad of outstretched hands. Jack saw that he had to make rapid forward advances if he expected to secure one of the morsels. About him the air was sulphurous with imprecations. Twisting and wiggling, he wormed his way forward a foot or two at a time. Once he was knocked to his knees, and crawling through the jungle of legs he came to the surface beside one of the wagon wheels. He held up a silver dollar as high as his arm could reach, but his arm was but one in a legion that formed a phalanx about the vehicle. Fast were the sandwiches disappearing. He endeavored to make himself heard above the confusion.

"Here you are! Here you are!" he yelled.

Presently one of the dispensers caught sight of the young man. Reaching over to the Kansan he passed him a sandwich dripping with grease and a tin cup full of hot coffee. The silver dollar was grabbed and tossed into a nearby box. Jack stood waiting for his change; his was a commercial instinct that measured values down to a cent. Had the dollar been a five it would have been the same; the law of extreme necessity fixes no price.

The current of humanity swept Jack by the wagon wheel to the rear of the conveyance, spilling half the contents of the tin cup before he had time to gulp it down. As he munched ravenously on the sandwich, he sought the open street where he finished his hard-

earned meal. None had ever been more appreciated, even in the fashionable cafes at K. C.

The simple meal put a keener edge on Jack's spirits. The sun was setting and he bestirred himself to find a place to sleep. Carried on by the crowd up one side of the street and down the other, he failed to discover anything that resembled a hostlery other than a sign over a stairway leading up beside a saloon to the floor above. The sign bore the high-sounding inscription:

"LACLEDE APARTMENTS."

"Laclede Apartments," Jack read aloud. "Umph," he muttered, "that sounds good—so did 'Palace Hotel' that I saw up the street. I wonder if it's as rotten?"

He stopped and looked up the stairway. He decided it was a case of taking any old thing that came along and be thankful for it. Oh! for the comfortable suite he had left at K. C.!

Climbing the stairs at a lively clip, he entered an open door leading into the hallway. To the left was a door on which was the printed word:

"LANDLORD."

The door opened in response to Jack's knock and a dark-haired, middle-aged man appeared. His attitude was welcoming. The man's vernacular betrayed his nativity; he was from below the Mason and Dixon line.

"Walk right in, suh," was the polite invitation that Jack accepted. "Have a chair. What ken I do fo' yo', suh?" asked the dark-haired one.

The Kansan stated his needs.

"Yo'-all are just in time, strangah," assured the Southerner. "I just threw a man outen a room fo'

gettin' drunk too often an' makin' a disturbance. I'll not have any drunks in this heah place, suh; not if I know myself."

Escorting the Kansan out into the hall that extended from one end of the building to the other, the proprietor opened a door that gave him a view of the interior of the room. It was comfortably large, well ventilated with an open window and contained a limited amount of furniture. While the furnishings were not lavish, they were elaborate as compared with those of other places in Kanokla. Taking everything into consideration Jack considered himself quite fortunate. He asked about the rates.

"Ten dollahs a day."

"Ten dollars a day, you say?" Jack was astonished, and then:

"Don't you think that a little steep? In K. C. I can get—"

"But this ain't K. C., suh," interrupted the landlord, "this heah is th' bo'dah. I ken get any price I want fo' these heah rooms, there are so many people without a place to sleep."

Jack pondered over the price for a moment as he rattled the silver in his trousers' pocket. It finally dawned upon him that the question at issue was not that of price, but whether he would find a place to rest his head for one night other than the grass-covered bosom of the prairie.

"Well," the Kansan said, reluctantly, "I'll take it for one night, anyway. Here's your ten."

Dropping the coin into the hand of the landlord, he departed after giving the assurance that he would be back later in the evening.

Jack's money-making instinct was never idle; even a friendly game of cards, with him, would necessarily have a material consideration. In the fashionable games at K. C. that he had indulged in before coming to the border his luck was fluctuating, though, on the whole, favorable.

His first thought on leaving the Laclede was to fill his pockets with stogies; his second intuition was to turn his spare time into money. There was but one way, for the present, that the latter could be done, and it was with cards. He had resigned his position with Moses Benson & Company to come to the Strip—not for the sole purpose of taking up a homestead, nor in the spirit of adventure, but with one idea in mind—to make money. If he had any other ideals they were buried under the deadwood of commercialism.

Jack entered the saloon underneath the Laclede, purchased a handful of cigars, lighted one, and was soon drawn into a four-handed game of poker by a trio of sharks, who, taking him for a tenderfoot, were bent on fleecing him.

The foxy gray eyes blinked merrily all through the series of games that lasted until the midnight hour. He said but little, smiled and chewed away on an ever-present cigar. When he quit the game he was several hundred dollars richer while his opponents were left penniless. Jack called the trio to the bar to drink at his expense. He could well afford to.

After giving each one of the three a good-night handshake, Jack left the saloon, turned the corner of the building and thence upstairs to his room. Before retiring he placed all of his valuables underneath the

pillow, then disrobed and rolled under the covers. The exciting events of the day buzzing in his mind failed to overcome his feeling of fatigue. The hum of voices in the saloon below was gradually dying out; he was soon asleep. Having been kept on a keen edge all day, his subconscious mind, however, was still alert in his slumber.

He had slept well—he did not know how long—when a rattling sound at the door awakened him. He raised himself on his elbow and listened. A slight shuffling of feet was audible.

Jack's eyes attempted to penetrate the darkness for something mysterious that could not be seen, yet heard. The noise ceased. He dropped back onto the pillow once more, assuring himself that it was but a dream—the hallucination of an irritated mind.

He was dozing again when he was awakened by other uncanny noises. He arose, looked out of the open window into the alley and inhaled deeply of the cool, nocturnal air. From below came the alternate curses and snores of an inebriate sprawled out amid the rubbish. Jack rubbed his eyes and sighed; he was now becoming restless; he listened attentively.

Not hearing any further mysterious noises, he returned to his bed on which he threw himself crosswise, placing his pillow near the window where he could get the benefit of the little nightly coolness that sifted through the opening.

He endeavored to sleep, but his overwrought nerves and the sultry air prevented slumber. He lay there, reading the stars through the window. The street was dimly lighted with smoky, blinking, kerosene lamps, but the music of the dance hall down the street

gave the air a metropolitan tone. The belated moon arose in the east, vividly outlining the buildings and causing the tents and covered wagons on the prairie in the background to appear like a legion of phantoms. From the invulnerable wall of blue on the border line came the announcement of the hour:

"Two o'clock and all's well," as it was relayed from one sentry to another down the line.

Heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs. Jack nervously arose on his elbow and reached for the six-gun that lay on the window sill. Down the hall the heavy clod of boots approached, not stealthily, but with the rattle of spurs. The noise ceased in front of the young Kansan's door and an effort was made to open it.

Jack leaned from his bed, gun in hand.

"What in hell do you want?" he demanded.

There was a slight shuffling of feet and then a voice in seismic bass:

" 'Scuse me, stranger, but I reckon I've got into the wrong stall."

The man was then heard moving to the next door which he opened and entered. Jack reclined on his bed once more, emitting a relaxing sigh as he did so.

"This is hell, sure enough," he muttered. "I wonder if this performance is repeated every night?"

In the adjoining room there was a squeaking of bed springs and heavy boots were heard to fall to the floor; then all was silent.

Presently "crack!' detonated a gun-shot in the room recently occupied. Jack grabbed his revolver and leaped from his bed again.

"I wonder what I've gotten into here?" he asked

himself. "An arsenal? Or are the ghosts of an old battlefield haunting me?"

There was intense commotion in the hall as men rushed to the scene of the shooting. Jack, partly dressed, shoved his valuables into his pockets and made his way out into the corridor, holding tenaciously to the handle of the gun. In the hall were men of every description. The landlord was in the lead, carrying a lamp. Everyone listened, expecting to hear groans.

Cautiously the host opened the door, then stepped inside, followed by the crowd, all with open mouths and wide, apprehensive eyes. A lighted lamp and a quart bottle of liquor adorned the dresser. Facing the wall opposite the window was none other than old Wall-eyed Kaintuck who evidently was unconcerned over the presence of the intruders. He was examining a hole made by a bullet in the wall.

"I got him, sure enough; see the blood?" he exclaimed, gleefully.

"Got what?" asked the astonished gathering, in unison.

"That bedbug. Can't yer see th' blood?"

"Ah, th' devil!" admonished the proprietor as he proceeded to give the man a lecture in regard to the rules of the house.

Jack returned to his room disgusted, threw himself on the bed and rolled about nervously.

"It's no use trying to sleep where the hours of the night are tolled off by pistol shots," he soliloquized.

He looked at his watch. It was near morning, anyway, and he decided to go outside where it was cool and quiet.

He dressed himself, blew out the light and moved leisurely down the stairs and out into the street. The dim street lights and the glimmer of the saloon windows blinked in rivalry with the moon which was now well up and full-orbed. Occasional animated shapes were seen going and coming. Jack inflated his lungs deeply of the cool air, then rambled in the direction of the dance hall, nonchalantly smoking one of his choice cigars. Arriving at the place of amusement he peered into a window. To the music of a negro stringed orchestra a quadrille was on, participated in by men in nondescript attires and girls dressed ultra-décolleté, the feminine features barbarously powder-stained. Jack moved on to the door and stepped inside. Those among the crowd too intoxicated to dance were lounging clandestinely in couples about the card tables and benches, and a bevy of negro porters was kept busy carrying in tray loads of liquor to give added inspiration to the orgie.

While the Kansan was a man of the world, the licentiousness of the place disgusted him. He declined an invitation to participate in the carousal, left the place and meandered on down the sidewalk.

The board walk soon ended and he found himself on the brink of the open prairie. Beyond could be seen the dying embers of campfires and scattered tents and wagons. To the right of him, to the left of him and in front of him were men scattered about on the grass —some enwrapped in blankets; others with nothing over them and with but their folded coats for pillows. It was with difficulty that he avoided stepping on the prostrate forms. Lifting his feet over one body and stumbling over another, he reached a small, unoccu-

pied mound. It was quiet and cool here—a comfort that could not be obtained at the Laclede.

Jack relighted his cigar, laid his folded coat on the grass and rested his elbow thereon. About him, above the stillness of the night, arose the peaceful snores of sober men and the irregular mumbling and curses of drunks.

Jack stared dreamily at the blue line of government authority that stretched from east to west several yards ahead of him. The blue-clad figures were moving back and forth on their beats, their well-polished rifle barrels scintillating occasionally in the moonlight. Beyond was the billowed, uninhabited prairie—uninhabited except for a few scattering Indians who still remained on the Strip and Sooners who were in hiding in the canyons. The short, withered grass shone golden in the eyes of the Kansan, who dreamed of naught but the virgin wealth contained in the millions of acres soon to be settled. In his materialistic mind every blade of grass represented a golden dollar —the sight was pleasing to him—a solace to his irritated mind.

"This is real comfort," he remarked to himself, with a sigh. "I could almost go to sleep here."

A dark shadow arose from the grass between Jack and the dead line. The Kansan watched it closely as it half crawled in the direction of the Forbidden Land. It disappeared once, only to come to the surface again as a soldier approached the opposite end of his beat. Jack arose to his knees and watched the dark shape as it disappeared and reappeared with each alternate coming and going of the sentry.

The soldier had about-faced and was moving west-

ward. The object was near the line, and as soon as the soldier's back was turned, it made a several-yard dash across the border; then dropped out of sight in the dry, yellow grass. The soldier, hearing a rustling, stopped, rested on his gun and listened keenly. A half minute later he shouldered arms and resumed the pacing of his beat.

Jack kept his eye on the spot where the object had disappeared, expecting to see it rise again. Nothing was noticed to move for several minutes, until a hundred yards beyond, it loomed up eminently and started to move directly southward. The eye of the soldier caught the moving speck of black; the rifle was instantly removed from his shoulder and brought to a position to fire.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The challenge reverberated over the plains. There was no reply; the figure continued moving southward.

The rifle spat a white flash; there was a snappy report, and the z-z-zing of a bullet could be heard ripping the air.

Jack moved closer to the line to watch results. The object moved faster; the soldier advanced several yards on a trot and was joined by two of his companions-in-arms who came running up to the line. Three shots rang out in rapid succession. After the smoke had disseminated, the object could not be seen.

The Kansas moved up as near the line as he dared. The three infantrymen trotted swiftly on, their rifles cocked.

"I guess we hit him," one was heard to say.

Soon they returned, bearing a limp form from which black, liquid drops were seen to fall in the grass.

Jack, in his anxiety to see the result of the shooting, as the squad approached, stepped a few feet over the border.

"Get back over the line, there," roared a soldier, officiously.

The Kansan retreated to a safe distance. He watched them lay the form down near the line, their coldness and indifference not inviting any questions.

A few of the sleeping population of the prairie, awakened by the shots, ventured near the scene. The white face of the corpse lay grotesquely upturned in the moonlight. The men in blue stood staring at each other as if undecided what next to do.

Finally, down the line strode a figure exceedingly trig and military in appearance. His bearing was that of a West Pointer, but the chevrons on his sleeves ranked him but a sergeant. He was received with salutes by the squad. Although a soldier himself, the "non-com" removed his hat and looked down sympathetically into the white, boyish visage.

"A young Easterner, eh?" he remarked.

"No, sir; a Sooner," responded a buck private. "He tried to break through the line."

"Sooner, the devil," insisted the sergeant. "The fellow was drunk and didn't know what he was doing."

The officer searched the clothing for identification. Jack, in a mood of inquisitiveness, advanced and looked into the pallid features which were clean-cut and refined. The hair, in vogue with the times, was parted in the center and the apparel was that of one from effete communities. No money was found on the person, and Jack drew his own conclusions from the evidence: the youth had been lured into the dance hall,

wined and drugged, robbed of his money and turned loose to wander in a stupor over the prairie.

The sergeant removed a letter from a pocket of the dead one and placed it within his own.

"Dig a hole over there and bury him"; he ordered, "that's all we can do. And be a little more careful about shooting these people hereafter."

"But the orders are—" a man of the ranks was about to insist.

"Orders, hell," interrupted the one of the striped sleeves. "Who gave you such orders?"

"Your superior officer, sir," returned the private, coldly.

The sergeant said nothing more. Taking a farewell look at the lifeless face of the unfortunate boy, he wheeled about and made rapid military strides back to his post.

After returning to the mound, Jack saw one of the contingent leave and return later with picks and shovels. The buck privates removed their jackets and proceeded to dig a grave.

"I thought some of sneaking through that line myself," Jack meditated, "but nothing like that for me."

Thereupon he decided to wire at once to his father in central Kansas to send him one of the fastest horses obtainable, and then make the run in a legal way.

Back on the mound once more, he stretched himself on the grass. He watched the eastern horizon as the yellow-green of the moonlit sky commenced to dissolve in a gray nebula; then as the mist disintegrated and the gray became florid with the encroaching light of a new day, he listened to the sonata of a mocking bird as it heralded the advance of morn.

One night gone and but little sleep. Jack moaned and yawned. And two weeks before the opening. It was certainly hell. Could he stand it? Besides he didn't know what minute he was going to be shot to pieces. It was the toughest hole he had ever gotten into.

The young Kansan gazed sleepily in the direction of the Land of Promise, and as far as his perspective carried was the yellow, rolling prairie. His phantasy brought to view cities, vast farms, mines, railroads—all of which meant wealth for the man of shrewd, gray eyes. But two weeks of the fires of Pluto on the border intervened.

He was now feeling intensely the lack of substance within himself, but he smiled—the sight was pleasing; opportunity lay beyond. Let come what may during the next two weeks; he was self reliant; he would see the thing through.

Daylight now in the ascendancy, Jack stretched his muscles and started toward town. Arriving in front of a restaurant he noted activity within. The cafe had received fresh supplies during the night and he was among the first to be able to obtain breakfast before the stampede for food began.

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE RUN

THE Cherokee opening! Chroniclers of the making of the West fall short of the mark when they attempt to depict anything more stirring than the great struggle for land in the Strip that was opened on that eventful September day when thousands upon thousands of riders entered in one of the greatest races in all time. The original opening of Oklahoma, a few years previous, was mediocre in comparison. To the thousands who participated in the contest and who are today residents of the teeming and prosperous state of Oklahoma, all of the important epochs in the commonwealth's history are dated from this great event.

Of the millions of acres, very few were entered upon but that were contested, if not in the courts of the frontier in which the handiest with the gun sat in judgment, in the government land office where title was awarded after organization succeeded chaos.

The border life of Kanokla had a telling effect on Jack Morrison during the fortnight previous to the run. The exciting scenes of the first day and night in the boundary town constituted but a part of the great western drama that was being enacted in repertoire. He became insensate to the music of the six-shooter and his feelings dulled at the sight of dead men, but the constant tension of being on guard for his own existence kept him keyed up to a high pitch incessantly. Especially was this true when indulging in card games at which he whiled away most of the two weeks.

Jack's acquaintance with Edgar Barks developed

into a warm friendship, and as the day of the race approached, the two became inseparable. Both clever with the pasteboards, they made common cause in inveigling the unsuspecting into poker games which invariably left the lambs less opulent than when they had come to the border.

The boiling southern sun of each day shone down upon additional thousands of people, and train load after train load of horses were dumped onto the prairie —some of them pedigreed steeds with racing records for generations back and acquired especially for the run. Others of lesser fame grazed upon adjacent plains—heavy draught horses from Illinois; branded, half wild ponies from the Kansas mesas; stately Arabians and broad-backed Percherons.

As the days passed, Jack was greatly concerned over the fast horse he had telegraphed for. He wired again to his father and received a reply that the animal had been shipped immediately on receipt of his former telegram. He then telegraphed orders that the shipment be traced, but received no response.

The day before the opening Jack and Barks assiduously besieged the freight office and noted every freight car that was shunted into the yards, but the way bills indicated nothing in horse flesh consigned to John Henry Morrison. The rush had congested every artery leading into Kanokla for an indefinite period.

Horse dealers brought in droves of equines every day and sold them at fabulous prices. At one of these sales the evening before the opening, the young Kansan succeeded in purchasing a cayuse, sound of limb, though not built for racing. But it was the best ob-

tainable. As for saddles, not one was to be had at any price—he would be compelled to cling as best he could to the animal's bare back in the great race.

Realizing his handicap, Jack filled the air with maledictions over the failure of the arrival of his favorite steed as he led the pony away from the sale. That night, he with his ally lay on the prairie beside their horses which were tethered to jack oaks.

"It's strange that you don't want to make the run for a homestead, Barks," remarked the younger man. "While there will be fifty men for every tract, yet it's a good gamble and I'm going to take a chance even with the skate I've got to ride on."

"Yes, it's a chance—too damn much of a chance. And if you do beat someone else to the claim, there's another chance of having to shoot it out with the others who might claim possession. While I'm game, and willing to gamble on anything, I'd rather take a shot at something wherein I can use my head to an advantage and not have to exert myself so much like a feller will have to do in this race."

Barks had reached the age in which the excitement and thrill of the contest did not appeal to him as it did to the younger and redder-blooded Jack.

"Have you made arrangements for water and supplies on the homestead you expect to stake out?" Barks queried of his companion as he lay on his back and shot a cloud of cigar smoke starward.

"No, I'd never thought of that."

"Well, you'd better be thinking of it," admonished the senior. "You may have to stay on the claim for several days, and you know there's not been a drop of

rain for weeks and the creeks are as dry as the Sahara."

Barks drew his blanket tighter about him and looked up at the astral formations. Then again:

"I'll tell you what I'll do, old man. You get in on the front line in the race and travel as light as you can; then I'll follow close in the rear with my calico, taking enough supplies with me to keep you going for a time, and then I'll return to the border. I don't give a rip about trying for a claim, myself; I'll make my wad after the Strip is settled up off those who succeeded in getting a homestead."

"That'll be fine," assured Jack. "If I don't win a homestead in this race there'll be plenty of opportunities to pick up some coin over there after the big thing is all over. Yes, the Cherokee Strip is going to be a lively place for awhile, and maybe we can get in on a real, big deal, Barks, where we can make a cleanup that will be worth while."

"Yes," chuckled Barks, "I've a picture of you as one of the coming millionaires of the territory, living in a brownstone front and with a peach of a wife—one of those Southern beauties, for instance—"

"Me?" interrupted the young man; "me falling in love and getting married? You make me laugh, Barks. I don't have time to think of such things; I'm in the game to make the coin, d'you understand? But if I ever do take such a foolish notion in my head, it will be someone who is somewhat of an heiress herself. What's the use of wasting your life on any other?"

"You have the right idea, Jack," answered Barks. "Stay with it and you'll be a winner. But how about that pretty little dark-eyed dame you said you saw

down in the mountains of Arkansaw?" His were the tantalizing, teasing words of an older man.

"Oh, her?" Jack hesitated, and then adroitly: "Barks, won't it be a great old day tomorrow? I wouldn't miss it for anything. Why, I've never seen such a mob of people together at one time, and everyone's going to make a try for a claim. It's certainly a live old town tonight. And still they're boiling in here every minute."

"I should say as much," Barks answered with a somniferous grunt.

Jack dozed off to sleep to be awakened later by Barks and take up the relief while the older man slumbered.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT CHEROKEE RACE

KANOKLA'S ephemereal horde was up and stirring by the time the army bugle clarioned the notes of reveille. Guard mount on the line followed shortly afterward. The wall of blue that held in check the pent-up human accumulation was doubled, reinforced, as it were, by cavalrymen on the prairie just over the line—lean, brawny horsemen in slouch hats, sans jackets, their blue flannel shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows.

As the noon hour approached, the line of blue took on a vari-hued fringe to the northward which gradually broadened and extended its entire length. Men on horseback rode up to the border. The animals, keyed up to a high tension and anxious for slack rein that they might leap forward, were rearing on their hind legs and slobbering at the bits. Man and horse seemed to be surcharged with the same vital fluid which was held in check only by the Law—the Law of the United States of America, backed by its guns. Human and animal alike were imbued with the hot sense of expectancy that within a few minutes their energies would be given the desired license. Closer the formations became until the ribs and flanks of the animals rubbed each other and stirrup became entangled with stirrup, calling for oaths and threats from their riders. Back of the first line formed teams of horses and teams of mules attached to prairie schooners, carriages and other conveyances that were to follow the racers over the broad sun-baked course with loads of supplies; with equipment for every kind of vocation

from a shoemaker's kit to bank fixtures and printing presses.

Soldiers were kept on the move keeping back the pressure. They hot-footed double quick up and down the line, ordering back with oaths the over-enthusiastic and not hesitating to use the butts of their guns or points of their bayonets in prodding into line the land-hungry rabble.

Occasionally an unmanageable horse broke over. Cavalrymen quickly centered on the point, however, and crowded the horse and rider back into place.

"Keep back there, damn you; keep back there!" yelled the men in the uniform of the United States as they dodged from one point to another.

The sun was nearing the zenith and the riders held their open watches in their hands, counting each tick as the hour of high twelve approached. Within a few seconds of the epochal moment time pieces were again encased. Horsemen held taut their reins and leaned far forward over their animal's manes with spurs aimed at the ribs of their steeds. Mounted army officers dashed to and fro to see that all was in readiness. There was a noticeable lull, then the cannon boomed! The blue wall of the law crumbled like the breaking away of a dam; the human debacle swept over the border!

One of the greatest races in history was on!

Jack Morrison was in the front rank on his pony when the signal was given. The animal whinneyed exultingly when the volley was sounded, reared and leaped into the air. It was needless for the rider to use his spurs, the cayuse was in its native element racing over the prairies. Being without saddle and not

expert at riding, Jack found it difficult to keep astride.

The pony made great headway at first, but gradually the faster pedigreed animals overtook and passed it.

Jack occasionally peered in each direction and as far as he could see were horses of every color and breed, all galloping southward. At intervals one would stumble and fall, tossing the rider to the ground, but the remounting was quick. Several in the advance guard were noticed to stop, dismount, and after examining the government stakes, pace off their claims and afterward stand on a section corner with gun cocked.

Jack kept his eyes directed well ahead, looking for an opening and suitable ground to pace off his homestead. On and on he rode, leaping over shallow canyons and crossing dry river bottoms. A quarter of a mile ahead of him he descried two men standing on a section corner and shaking fists at each other belligerently. As he passed them, six-shooters glistened in the sunlight. Jack never paused, but hearing a shot, glanced backward over his shoulder and saw only one of the party standing. One contest had already been settled.

Several miles had been traveled and the pony was foaming. Its gait slackened, making it necessary to use the spurs at greater frequency. A river bank was finally reached, causing the horse to stop abruptly and wheel. Jack, looking down into the dry bottom, saw the bank was too steep to attempt to cross, so changed his course to the east.

He followed the river for about two miles, but at the corner of every quarter section found someone

claiming previous possession. A little farther onward and a section corner was reached by him. The tract looked quite pleasing and unusually level.

"Just hunkydory for a townsite," muttered the Kansan, "and nobody seems to be ahead of me."

He dismounted and examined the stake. Leaving his horse hitched to a jack oak, he guessed the direction by the setting sun and commenced pacing eastward. About half way across the quarter section he encountered a canyon lined with scrub oaks and mesquite. Jack hesitated and was pondering on how he could cross the chasm without losing his measurement, when a tall, lanky figure loomed up like an apparition amid the underbrush, as if tossed up from the gorge. Before the young Kansan could reach for his holster he was looking down the barrel of a shooting iron backed by a youth under a slouch hat. Jack retreated a pace or two.

"I reckon we-all done got heah fust," growled the figure.

"We-all? Who do y' mean by 'we-all'?" demanded Jack.

"Me an' dad an' Laura, suh," came the reply as the empty hand pointed up the canyon.

Jack glanced in the direction indicated and several rods away made out two mules, a wagon, an elderly man and a girl. Not a horse was to be seen.

"How did you come to get here so quick with those mules?' he demanded.

"None yo're damned business, suh!"

"Then you're a Sooner and not entitled to this claim!"

"I'm not a Soonah, suh; I'm from A'kansaw an' a

Southern gentleman, suh; an' if yo'-all don't git outen heah in a right sma't hickory I'll shoot yo're blamed Yankee head off."

Jack saw that further argument was useless. He walked back to his horse, mounted the animal and rode on galloping to the east.

On the way he spoke to the horse:

"Might as well reason with a razorback as that Arkansawyer, eh, old man? Well, they must have gotten onto that claim a day or so before the opening, and as such are Sooners and should be driven off."

The Kansan halted his pinto and meditated for a moment while the animal pawed the earth with his forefoot. Then his features lit up with an idea and he continued, as he patted the horse on the neck:

"I know what I'll do, old man. I'll not attempt to run any more; everything will be taken by this time anyway. That Arkansawyer has an ideal homestead, and when he comes to prove up I'll contest it. I'm satisfied I can beat him out in the land office."

Pulling on the left rein he pivoted his horse about and started westward. It was now near sundown, and as he was out of the race he decided to let the pony walk at its leisure that it might recover from the unfruitful run it had made.

His mind up to this time having been centered on the race, he had forgotten about Edgar Barks who was supposed to be in the rear with supplies. It was understood that Jack's ally was not to lose sight of him, but now, as the Kansan scanned the plains in every direction, no one resembling Barks or his calico cayuse could be seen.

"Queer," Jack muttered. "He may have lost track of me in the rush. No use now, anyhow."

He halted in an effort to get his bearings. He was still on the brink of the river, but where was the point on its shore that he had first reached in the race? It was there that he desired to head northward and return to Kanokla. Besides, the sun would soon disappear and he might be compelled to camp on the prairie for the night.

He finally concluded there was but one thing for him to do, and that was to head northward before darkness got too thick on the plains. While he might not strike Kanokla, he could not miss the Kansas state line.

Jack turned his cayuse about and clucked. The animal appeared equally anxious to return to the sunflower state as it leaped forward without any urging.

He had not proceeded very far before the sun had set and night was covering the prairie with a star-studded mantle. He reached forward and affectionately patted the horse on the neck as an owl flew up from its path.

"Well done, old boy," he spoke to the animal between leaps. "We've lost out in this race, but you did your best."

A prairie dog town was invaded, the holes in the ground being numerous, though in the twilight of evening few were discernable. It was obvious to Jack that to avoid danger he must sidestep his horse about the holes as there was a possibility of the animal's foot entering one of them and throwing both it and the rider.

But the intuition came too late. Unexpectedly the steed suddenly fell forward like a sinking ship at sea plunging bow downward. The momentum of the galloping horse caused it to somersault, and pitching the rider high into the air, landed him on the back of his head onto a patch of hard, sun-baked ground.

CHAPTER VII

AND HE RECOGNIZED HER NOT

JACK MORRISON opened his eyes and looked dreamily up at the star dome above him. All was darkness save the dim light of the celestial gods and the distant flickers of campfires.

"Where am I?" he asked himself, stupidly.

The whinneying of a horse was the only reply that came from the stillness—a cry pitiable and distressing.

Turning his head to one side, the Kansan made out against the blue-black of the horizon the dark outlines of his pony. The animal whinneyed again and attempted to move toward him, but fell on its nose, one of its front limbs dangling in the movement.

Consciousness partially returned to the Kansan. He finally recalled the incidents of the day, culminating in the accident that befell himself and the horse.

He hallooed once, twice, three times: "Help!'

Only the echo of his own voice and the faint bark of a coyote replied.

Once more the horse pointed its nose to the stars and whinneyed.

"Old boy, I'm going to end your suffering if I don't my own," spoke the Kansan to the unfortunate beast.

It required all his strength to remove the pistol from the holster. Rolling over on one side, he took careful aim at a point directly under the horse's ears as they were pricked forward. A short, sputtering line of flame at the gun's mouth marked the course of the bullet; the beast's knees bent underneath it and it rolled on its side in a death quiver.

"Gawd, but I'm sick; I'll have to get out of this some way or I'll die," moaned Jack, as he replaced the six-shooter within the sheath. He then rolled over on his stomach and crawled forward with difficulty, stopping every three or four yards to rest.

"If I only had a drink; Gawd, but I'm thirsty." The words were uttered faintly.

A line of trees ahead of him marked the brink of a creek; or was it just a mirage? There may be water there, he thought.

It seemed to him hours before he reached the fringe of vegetation. He was now feverish with thirst. Down the steep bank through the alders and underbrush he wormed his way, rolling over at times, and again crawling. Encountering pebbles, he was satisfied that he was now at the bottom of the canyon. As he felt his way along, his hand came in contact with some moist sand, but no water! With the sand he rubbed his forehead and it seemingly gave relief. He dug assiduously down into the gravel but encountered nothing but damp earth. He listened keenly but not a trickle could be heard.

A rattlesnake? What was the strange rustling in the grass near him? He rolled over on one side and gasped. Beside him he could hear the cold, clammy, crawling thing, but could see nothing; nor dare he stretch a hand forward and feel. Then his blood ran cold—colder than the night breezes that soughed lightly through the stunted trees overhead—there was the warning rattle—the z-z-z-z-z that seemed to be right in his upturned ear. He raised himself on his elbow and looked behind him, expecting to see the curved body of the thing in the attitude of striking. He

dared not move in any direction for fear of encountering the invisible thing. Was it in front of him? Was it behind him? Beside him? Where? Again the warning buzz. Was he so crazed with thirst and fever that the noise was but an insidious fantasy—a grotesque hallucination of a mind made sympathetic with a suffering body? No. While he was weak in body he was strong in spirit. He decided to make a supreme effort to rise to his feet. He placed one hand in the grass by his side that he might brace himself, but—

"My Gawd!" he exclaimed with a shudder as he jerked the hand up under his arm-pit. In resting his palm on the grass he felt the cold, slimy, round body of a moving thing. Then the nearby rattle again, and as Jack strained his eyes, weakened as they were in sympathy with his body, he beheld a dark shadow of a thing with a knob-like head rise up beside him. The head drew back; he could hear it hiss, and then—

The Kansan, gasping and trembling, and with the veins in his throat palpitating with such violence that breathing was executed with difficulty, arose with all the energies at his command to his knees and threw himself forward in an opposite direction just as the fangs of the rattler grazed his clothing. Then making both hands and feet move in the attitude of a man swimming on the surface of water, he managed to negotiate several feet before being compelled to give up from sheer exhaustion.

There he rested and panted for several minutes.

Thirsty? Yes, it seemed to him that his tongue seared the roof of his mouth.

"Hell and damnation," he moaned. "The creek is dry and I'm dying for a drink."

The blood was rushing feverishly to his head and throbbing violently in his lips and tongue. Face downward, he rooted insanely among the pebbles and dampened sand; he was like a madman. He clawed and tore into the gravel with his hands until the ends of his fingers bled. While thus crazed with thirst a stupor overcame him and he fell asleep, in the midst of which a scene appeared: It was at the zenith of daytime and a forest of pines and cedars partially obscured the sunlight—their broad branches spread over him like fans held by slaves over Egyptian kings. A slight breeze made the green needles and leaves in the tree tops rustle musically; among the boughs twittered birds in an extravagance of plumage and up and down the convoluted bark raced red squirrels chattering noisily. From off the tree-clad hillside and hide-and-seeking in and out among the growth of ground hemlock and fern-brakes flowed a rivulet which had its source in a bubbling spring above. Reaching a rock ledge, the stream formed a pool in which it eddied about and then spilled over the lip of a rock, in a bridal veil, to the canyon several feet below. Through a rent in the evergreen foliage Hyperion rays played with the torrent—stroking the folds of the veil and causing it to sparkle in ultramarine, then orange, then indigo, then violet, in the fickleness of its color-love. The spray from the waterfall covered the cascade as it laughed below over the pebbles with a gauze of moisture—minute translucent opals interwoven so as to half conceal and half disclose its chastity—a gauze through which passed unchallenged none but the seven colors of the rainbow, variegating the hues of the lilies and goldenrod that nestled among the ferns on

the higher banks. Looking up from the moist moss among the rocks at the water's edge like the blithesome visages of children, were the smaller flora—the petals of buttercups and lady-slippers. As the rivulet rolled over rocks and pebbles like a pampered prince following the lines of least resistance, the scrub-hemlock, the wild fern and pussy-willow bent forward over its course in perpetual obeisance.

In this dream Jack bent over a boulder, face downward, and drank lustily from the stream. How cool and rejuvenating was the water! It seemed as though he would never be satisfied so insatiable was his thirst. He drank and he drank, and then pillowed his face on its surface and doused his head into the pool again and again in an effort to lower the blood temperature of his feverish brain.

The sound of voices caused him to awaken from his delirium and listen attentively. The vista had changed as if a curtain had been raised on another scene—

All was darkness once more, the gem-studded sky only outlining the scrubby trees above him.

"I reckon someone has been shot," a voice was heard to say in Southern accent. Then followed, in feminine tones:

"Anyhow, daddy, we must get thar in a hurry an' help him."

A yellowish light appeared in the near distance, then disappeared—it seemed to Jack for ages. He was about to cry out again when a rustle was heard in the bushes above him on the canyon bank and there loomed up an elderly man resting on a cane and holding a lighted candle. Close behind him was a maid of about

fifteen summers, barehead and attired in unostentatious apparel.

" 'Pears to me he'd ought t'be hereabout somewhere, Laura," spoke the aged figure as he looked down into the gorge.

"Oh, thar he is, daddy! Pooah fellah! He's huht; let's help him outen this."

The girl waited until her father was stooping over Jack and peering into the Kansan's face by the light of the candle; then she joined him. As she studied the stranger's features, she was for a moment startled; then a sense of compassion overcame her. She had seen the blonde hair, the gray eyes and the intelligent business face before. But where? She could not recall. Southern ethics prevented her from asking.

"Well, suh, I reckon yo'-all are huht quite bad," sympathetically remarked the gray-bearded man as he scrutinized the Kansan's blood-stained features as if possibly to make out those of an acquaintance. "Are yo'-all done shot?"

"Oh, no; just thrown from a horse." Jack then went into details in giving an account of the accident. "Have you any water?" he asked.

"Reckon we done have jus' a little in a bucket. Watah is mighty sca'ce in these heah pa'ts as all th' cricks have done gone dry. My boy, Gardy, he's gone on a mule t' find some if he ken, but I 'lowed there be none in the hull new kentry. Ken yo'-all make it to our camp if we help yo, strangah?"

"I may be able to navigate if you can get me to my feet."

"Laura," commanded the old man, "take hol'

tothah ahm while I stay on this heah side an' help him to th' camp."

When lifted to his feet, Jack could not stand at first, but after a few steps had been taken he was able to half drag himself, with the assistance of the old man and girl, through the brush to where a camp fire was burning beside a canvas-covered wagon and one lone tethered mule.

He was laid down by the fire and the bucket of water fetched. The old man dipped up the water with a cup and held it to the Kansan's burning lips. The first cupful gave him renewed vigor and he was able to sit up; a second cupful was given him which he gulped down with equal avidity.

The girl poured some water on a piece of linen with which she bathed the Kansan's face. After the blood had been washed away, she stopped and looked into his features for a moment—features that were browned after several days in the open. A ringlet of black fell across his shoulder, causing him to raise his head and look dreamily and stupidly into the face of his attendant. He caught her smiling, but instantly she turned her head to one side and the light of the crackling fire revealed a pink hue flooding her cheeks. She retreated timedly into the darkness.

"I reckon yo-all would like a bit t' eat, suh," interposed the elderly person before Jack could come to any conclusion as to where the girl had gone.

"Well, sir," replied the young man, "it would help a whole lot."

"Laura?"

"Yes, daddy.'

The girl had been standing in the blackened background, eyeing the visitor searchingly.

"I reckon some o' th' bacon is still wa'm, an' if the strangah don't mind eatin' some o' that an' some corn bread, we'-all ken help him out."

"This, sir, is very kind of you," responded Jack, in a somewhat weakened voice, "but I don't want you to rob yourself."

"Not at all, suh," assured the Southerner, as he proceeded to light his pipe after turning over the embers of the campfire.

The girl soon had the warm victuals on a plate before Jack. He thanked her without looking up, and immediately proceeded to devour the humble meal. Nothing he had ever eaten in his life had tasted better.

The old man sat dreamily watching the fire and puffing out clouds of blue smoke.

"Wondah what's th' mattah with Beauregard? He done 'lowed he'd be back befo' this time," he finally remarked.

Arising from the box on which he was sitting, the grizzled one leaned on his cane and attempted to penetrate the darkness beyond the fire with his aged vision.

Jack had finished his meal and was feeling the glow of new life once more. He arose to his feet but was still dizzy and staggered slightly.

"Want some mo' t' eat?" timorously asked the girl. "We done have a-plenty."

"No, thank you," Jack replied indifferently, as he stretched himself out beside the fire and lighted a cigar with a fagot.

While Jack was smoking and dreaming, the old Southerner started.

"There he comes, I reckon," he hastily exclaimed, thinking of his son and one of the mules who had gone in search of water.

At the sound of hoof-beats Jack stood upright.

"Yo'-all shore that's brothah?" insisted the Miss, while her father was still endeavoring to make something out in the darkness.

"Dunno."

The put-a-put, put-a-put on the prairie grass became plainer. Then out of the darkness and within the radius of the light of the fire entered a man on horseback. The horse was a calico, with large, white blotches on its face and roan sides.

Jack recognized the pony at once as that of Barks.

"Well, I'll be damned," he shouted as he staggered forward to meet the horseman.

The new arrival drove up closely and squinted inquisitively into the startled faces of the old man and girl.

"Hello! Is that you, Barks?" challenged the Kansan as he moved nearer the rider. Barks recognized his companion at once and dismounted.

"Well, well," he said, breathlessly, as they shook hands. "Where in the devil have you been all this time? I've been galloping all over the blamed Strip looking for you. I was so far in the rear when they shot the gun off that I got mixed up in the shuffle and lost track of you entirely."

Barks studied the two Southerners and then turned again to Morrison.

"How came you here? Where is your horse?"

The story of the accident was repeated.

"Hard luck," commented Barks. "Do you feel well enough to ride?"

"Sure I do."

"Then get on behind and we'll be in Kansas before daylight."

Jack strode over to the old man and shook his hand.

"I must bid you good-night, and I thank you a thousand times for your kindness to me."

The elderly personage arose and rested on his cane, still holding the Kansan's hand.

"Suh," he spoke, "yo'-all owe us nothin'." He released his grip and patting the young man on the shoulder wished him worlds of good luck.

Again Jack thanked him heartily. Then he leaped astride the horse behind Edgar Barks who had already mounted and the two and their pony soon disappeared in the blackness of the night.

The girl stood with her hands locked behind her, watching the riders as they were leaving the camp. Dimmer and dimmer their outlines became, but she eyed them steadfastly until their shapes became dissolved in the darkness.

"Why didn't he bid *me* good-night?" she asked herself, petulantly, as she stamped her foot on the grass. "Anyhow, I done seen him befo', but when an' where I jus' can't reckon fo' th' life of me."

From off the breeze-kissed prairie the well-measured foot beats of the horse could still be heard, and she listened to them until they could not be distinguished from the thumping of her heart. Out of the darkness men's voices reached the ears of milady of the Ozarks.

"Who were those people by the fire?" one was heard to say.

"Didn't take time to ask. From the way they talked I'd judge them to be mountaineers."

"Well, that girl wasn't a bad looker, anyway."

"Wasn't she? Guess I must have been too much all in by my fall from the horse to notice in particular—just my luck to be dazed when good sights come along."

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH EMPIRES ARE PLANNED

OW did you make out with your contest, Jack?" asked Edgar Barks.

Barks and Jack Morrison were sitting at a table in one of the fashionable cafes in Wichita one spring evening. A little more than three years had passed since the great race had added thousands to the population of Oklahoma—nearly three years and a half during which the two had become widely known as kings at the poker game, at faro, at three-card monte and other games of chance with cards. From the short grass country in the Panhandle to the Indian territory borders, and from the Kansas state line to the Kiowa and Comanche reservations, they had plied their vocation until their names bore a high niche in the estimation of the gambling fraternity that infested the young territory. "Dollar Mark Johnnie," as Jack became known, hobnobbed with success, however, until he became the envy of others of the profession—even so to the extent that treacherous eyes had been leered at him time and again and rugged fingers played with the triggers of guns—but Gray Eyes had become dextrous in the use of a certain piece of hardware which he always carried conveniently, and many a worshiper of Chance, who had been outplayed by Jack Morrison, had been foiled when attempting to recover his losses by the gun method. And there was the stolid Barks, who, with his smooth personality and seeming innocence proved a valuable co-worker with the young Kansan. The two had become comparatively opulent, as far as opulence went among the strug-

gling inhabitants of the new territory, and the brilliance of their diamonds and their otherwise effulgence caused the other guests of the cafe to glance in that direction occasionally and converse subduedly.

Everything on the menu that the two desired had been disposed of and now only remained the wine order. The waiter had just brought in a bottle of champagne which was covered over with an icy dew from many hours in the refrigerator. The lights shone about the place with an unusual brilliancy, seemingly in honor of the two distinguished guests who were lavish in their orders. Many of the tables were occupied by well-dressed people of both sexes, some of whom were becoming boisterous from the effects of over-imbibing.

There was a brief interregnum in the orchestral program when Barks had asked the question.

"How did I make out, you say?" responded Jack as he poured out a full glass of sputtering beverage for his companion and one for himself. And then he continued, as he held the goblet in his hand and leaned back leisurely in the chair:

"I've at last decided to give up the fight, Barks. You see, the claim was squatted on by an Arkansawyer, named De Forrest. He was a Sooner and I would swear to it. Why, when I arrived at the place, there he was, gun in hand, and before I could reach for my six-shooter he had me covered. Of course, there was nothing else for me to do but vamoose; but I saw that all he had was a span of mules and a prairie schooner, and how in the devil he was able to beat so many fast horses with those mules and that heavy wagon is more than I can figure out. The fact is, the geezer must

have driven onto the property a week before and camped there."

Jack placed his glass to his lips and emptied it.

"The devil y'say," returned Barks, facetiously. "You told me that once. You must have taken one drink too many, Jack. But what I really want to know is how you came out in the land office?"

"How would you expect? I was unable to obtain any proof; then again, I've been taking too active a part in the politics of the territory of late, on the Republican side, to expect any favors of the Democratic receiver. Thank the Lord, now that the G. O. P. is in again, we may look for a change in the land office force soon. Then I'll renew the contest and I think I can bring enough pressure to bear on the new receiver to give his decision in my favor."

More champagne was poured from the bottle and swallowed; then both lighted cigars and leaned back in their chairs. The merriment of the guests about the room absorbed them, then Jack led off in the resumption of the conversation, leaning far forward over the table and speaking semi-confidentially.

"Do you know, Barks, I have a hunch?'

Barks was always receptive.

"A hunch? What kind of a hunch, Jack?"

"Take it from me, Ed; you know that little cross-roads place down in the strip called Ossineke—just a post office and a store or two?"

"Yes, that's not far from the claim you contested; but what does your hand show?"

"There's going to be a railroad built through there. The company has already filed its articles of incor-

poration at Guthrie and the survey will soon begin. I have it straight—right from headquarters."

"But, Jack, where will you come in? You know the railroad company will gobble up the townsite an'—"

"Not all of it," interrupted the younger man. "They'll hold the original townsite and sell it off pretty fast, I expect, after retaining enough for yardage; but I can see there's going to be a big boom there. Think of the country around it—all settled up, but since the opening over three years ago they've been compelled to haul their wheat and cotton sixty miles to the Rock Island to market it. This new town will draw the trade from at least thirty miles in every direction, and just think of the business there'll be! I've been waiting to go into the banking business, and now that I have enough coin, I think this will be a devil of a good chance."

"But, are you sure you have it straight, Jack?"

"Straight as a die. I don't see but there'll be one of the biggest booms in the little town of Ossineke that's happened since the opening. And the best of it is, very few people are aware of what is going to happen."

Both drew heavily on their havanas for a half-minute, then Jack's eyes sparkled assuredly.

"Then again, Ed, do you know what I've in mind?" he spoke.

"Spit it out. You seem loaded for bear tonight."

"You see, the new territorial legislature is of our political stripe by a scant majority. I've been at Guthrie having a talk with the boys, and I can get most anything I want from them. Old Bill Jones, the boss—you know him—well, I've fixed it up with him to have

the legislature create a new county out there with Ossineke as the county seat. That will give the town an additional boom, and Bill and I are going to invest in property there as soon as possible. I'm giving you this tip as a friend so that, if you want to, you can get in on the ground floor too."

"But that section of the country," insisted Barks, with deep, provincial, prejudicial feeling, "is pretty well settled up with Texans and Arkansawyers, you know. Won't that mean that the Democrats will control the county?"

Jack leaned forward and touched his accomplice lightly on the coat sleeve while his eyes narrowed designedly.

"Don't worry about that, Ed," assured the former salesman. "Of course, I know you love those unreconstructed fellows down there since your experience with Quantrell and his guerillas, but we'll have that all fixed."

"But, how'll you do it? Aren't they in the majority?"

"That depends on the territory, Ed. You know, down along the river there—there's a hell of a lot of niggers settled and they'll vote the Republican ticket first, last and all the time. What Bill Jones proposes to do is to gerrymander the boundaries of the new county so that it will reach down and take in those niggers, and that, we figure, will give the Republicans in the county a majority."

Barks' eyes bulged in amazement as he marveled at the stock of ideas with which the younger man's brain was loaded.

"Jack, you're a corker," he said; "but tell me, where did you get all this stuff? I've been perambulating a lot myself about the territory during the past three years and I've not been able to get next to anything like that."

He crossed his legs and turned to one side in his chair.

"I got it this way, Barks, so keep it under your hat: Bill Jones is one of the promoters of the Missouri, Oklahoma & Pacific, though but few know of it. I've been confiding with Bill quite a little of late and he has with me. I expect to be boss of the new county, if you please to call it—and the boys at Guthrie have made me one of them—but we must be going."

The two arose, kicked back their chairs from the table and filed out of the cafe. In the shadow of a vacant building, a half block up the street, they stopped and lighted cigars.

"Well, Jack, you certainly have a head on you," spoke up Barks as they ambled on.

Passing through a dense crowd which was being disgorged from a theatre, and along walks lined with cabs and carriages waiting to take pleasure-loving people to their homes from the cafes and from the play houses, Jack and Edgar Barks turned the corner that led to their apartments.

Neither uttered a word, so deeply absorbed were they in their plans, until arriving at the gate in front of their place of abode.

Jack hesitated and extended his hand to his fellow worker.

"Are you with me, Ed, in this deal?' he asked as

their hands were clasped and each looked questingly into the other's eyes.

"I'm with you till hell freezes over."

A night of pleasure had put them in a mood for immediate slumber, and they were not long in resting their heads on the feathers and dreaming pleasant dreams of the future in the Territory to the south.

CHAPTER IX

A BOOM TOWN IS FOUNDED

BETWEEN the third and fourth year after the opening of the Cherokee Strip, Colonel Johnson De Forrest, his son and daughter are still living on the homestead upon which they had squatted.

The first summer had brought with it a drouth, and the cobs from the corn harvested were insufficient to keep their sod house comfortable when the following winter's blizzard swept down from what they deemed contemptible Kansas; but with the spirit characteristic of the frontier, neighbors shared with them often in the time of need.

Colonel De Forrest, who had been among the number of that thin gray line who were the last to give a farewell salute to the Stars and Bars and take the oath of allegiance to the Union, now too enfeebled to be of any assistance, depended largely on his only son Beauregard to eke out an existence for the family. Their adversities, however, had no effect on the spirits of Laura, who delighted in driving the mules while her awkward brother lumbered between the handles of the plow, his prodigious feet interfering like those of one intoxicated.

With a year of plenty of wheat, corn and cotton, which had to be hauled sixty miles to the nearest railroad, sod houses became evanescent and frame buildings began to dot the prairie, varying in size from the two-room, rough-board dwelling occupied by the De Forrests to the more substantial two-story residences of the others who had come to Oklahoma with more of

this world's goods than the colonel and his family.

A change had likewise occurred in the administration of the territory's affairs. The national election of 1896 had reinstated the Grand Old Party once more, but the largely carpetbag government of Oklahoma Territory merely changed political hues.

A number of farmers about Ossineke were gathered as customary at the only store one evening, earnestly discussing the affairs of the nation and little dreaming of the possible future of their locality.

Beauregard De Forrest sat perched on a cracker barrel, languidly chewing his cud like a contented cow. Mid the babble of conversation he heard someone remark:

"Who was that well-dressed geezer that was in the store a few minutes ago?"

"Why, don't y' know who that feller is?" spoke up the proprietor, knowingly, from behind the counter. "That's Jack Morrison—Dollar Mark Johnnie—the card man and politician. I used t' know him up in Kansas before th' openin'; he used t' travel fer Benson & Co., out of K. C.—purty smooth feller, that chap."

Gardy's eyes bulged and his jaws relaxed.

"What's he doin' here? What's he up to?" asked several in an inharmonious chorus.

"I understand he's bought a strip o' land on th' corner over thar an' is goin' t' put up a buildin' an' start a bank."

"A bank?" reiterated several astonished voices.

Gardy left the barrel and peered searchingly into the faces of the crowd. The name Morrison was fa-

miliar to him—with it had been associated the land contest which had been decided in his favor.

"Ah, the man must be crazy," asserted one.

"I should say as much," added another. "What in th' devil would a bank do here? Nobuddy has any money about this country after so many years of drouth, chinchbugs an' every other ornery pest y' can think of. Where'll he get th' deposits?"

The crowd laughed. The idea of a bank in Ossineke appeared chimerical.

"I s'pose th' nex' thing will be skyscrapers, street kyars, newsapers an' all th' new-fangled things that go with a city," came an added remark which was likewise treated facetiously and with long-drawn-out haw-haws.

"But it's a fack," insisted the storekeeper, as he broke a cracker in two and gnawed at a section. "I know Jack Morrison well, an' he showed me th' papers, transferring the property on th' corner, right over yonder, to him."

The crowd stood gaping; but in the post office in another room, Jack Morrison smiled and squinted through a haze of cigar smoke.

"Humph! It's easy," he chuckled to himself, and thought of how his prestige as a banker and his influence with the territorial political machine he could have a new county formed with Ossineke as the county seat; then would follow a townsite boom, and—

He puffed violently, then smiled at the curls of smoke as if they assumed the shapes of dollar marks—oh, well, the rest would be easy.

The next day deals were consummated, transferring to John Henry Morrison two of the corner forty-

acre tracts on the Ossineke crossroads. The reported consideration was fabulous; the neighborhood was stunned and the people wondered what was coming next.

But things took still a greater turn that indicated developments far beyond the visions of the most sanguine of the people of Ossineke and its immediate hinterland. One day a party of strange men put in an appearance in the vicinity, bearing tripods on which were placed telescope-like instruments, and a number of steel chains, with which paraphernalia they made observations and took measurements.

Beauregard De Forrest left his dinner on the day of the arrival of the peculiar people and lumbered along to the scene of their operations. With his hands in his pockets, he looked upon them with awe.

"Huh, Yankees," he muttered to himself, and he reckoned as to what they were about to do.

The members of the surveying party, on being questioned, were reticent as to the purpose of their work, but within a few days it developed they were locating a right-of-way for a railroad!

The joy of the inhabitants of the community over the prospects of "kivered" cars traveling through that portion of the territory, knew no bounds. The visions of the people gradually were given over to long trains crawling like serpents over the prairie and energizing them with the "whang-whang-whang" of the exhaust and the siren screeches of locomotive whistles.

Then to add to their anticipations, the news was bruited about that a town was to be located in the midst of the settlement at the Ossineke crossroads; and then it was that those who insisted Jack Morrison

was visionary were among the first to again assert their wisdom by saying:

"I told you so."

Developments were exceedingly rapid in Oklahoma in those days. Within a month the Missouri, Oklahome & Pacific had been surveyed, the city of Ossineke platted, and hardly had the blueprints been filed when there came one of those real estate booms such as the Southwest in its palmy days alone has witnessed.

In the meantime Jack had not been idle. At Guthrie he kept his political wires busy and succeeded in having a new county created with Ossineke as the county seat.

Within ten days after the town lots were thrown on the market a community of fifteen hundred souls marked the spot where before was but a cornfield. The sale was like that of tickets to a popular matinee, and included not only the townsite laid out by the railroad company, but the high-sounding "Morrison & Barks First and Second Additions" as well.

In the beginning, the town consisted largely of tents, except in the business portion where a few temporary frame structures gave it a more substantial appearance. All the essentials of a co-ordinate municipality were there—bank, newspaper, hotels, wagon yards and thirst emporiums of the frontier kind. The last-named were operated "wide open," day and night, with their bars and gambling outfits in the main portion and a tent in the back yard of each as a habitat for the demi-mode. Ossineke was on the map—breezy, bad and booming many months before the arrival of the railroad. It was as if it had dropped down from

the skies and pre-empted that portion of the prairie over night.

Colonel De Forrest looked upon the whole proceedings as nothing short of Yankee aggressiveness. Gardy, in his amazement, "reckoned" it was going a "right sma't hickr'y" for a town to have the rapid growth of Ossineke, while his sister Laura found herself in a new world, the alacrity, the heterogenity and the diversity of the whole scene finding a receptive niche in her vivacious make-up.

She had never chafed under the prosaic life of Mount Zion, but now that she was witnessing activity even in the crude way of the West, she enjoyed it. Once tasting of the life, she became covetuous of more freedom beyond the conventional lines of one brought up in isolation. The town was booming and none looked upon the boom with greater pleasure than she. Had she been a Northern girl, Laura De Forrest might have entered into the spirit of the locality in a manner more demonstrative, but the breeding of a lady of Dixie held her in reserve. How lithe were those Northern business men! she thought; every move they made betokened mental and physical activity such as she had never witnessed among the slothful, drawling young gallants of the Ozarks. She felt her traditional prejudice leaving her as she admired their brisk manners; how they held their heads erect and swung their hands as they walked the streets! And yet, at times, she looked upon their ways as that of overbearing conquerors.

Representing the sections of the nation from which the population of Ossineke was almost evenly drawn, two religious denominations were among the first to

erect temporary structures in the town—the Jerusalem Church and the Jerusalem Church, South.

Though reared in the Baptist faith, Laura, while that denomination had no society in Ossineke, found time occasionally to leave the farm, and, accompanied by her brother, attend the meetings and other affairs at the South Jerusalem church. At these meetings the Ozark maid came in contact with dashing, well-dressed young men from Kansas—youths attracted to the meetings more in the spirit of adventure than a desire to mix religiously with the church members. Their aggressive mannerisms were received coldly by the dark-eyed, alluring Southern girl.

"She's a frost," remarked one ambitious youngster while commenting on her at one of the meetings.

"She cut me cold," added another.

The third, with elevated chin, scornfully followed: "Oh, well; she's only from the mountains of Arkansaw and what can you expect of her?" Then his chin lowered. "But, I tell you, fellers: she is a peach of a looker even if she did come from the foothills."

Had these comments been conveyed to the ear of the subject of the conversation, the Stars and Bars would undoubtedly have been once more flung to the breeze.

CHAPTER X

THE STAR CHAMBER SESSION

ELL, Jack, we're looking for you to keep the newly organized county in line. How does she look? The unreconstructed very strong over there?"

The inquiry was made by Bill Jones, the adipose territorial boss, at a conference of the political leaders in the Guthrie office of a lawyer named Flanigan.

"Everything is lovely, Bill, providing we can keep the two nigger townships in line—that is, according to the poll I've made."

So saying Jack Morrison blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling, then leaned far forward, resting one hand on his knee, while he continued to speak to the territorial boss, confidentially:

"You see, it's like this, Bill: the niggers don't know anything about voting, having been 'grandfathered' in the states where they came from, and they all follow the lead of two or three of the more intelligent members of their race. I have made great promises to the bell-wethers in order to keep them in line—one of which is that at least one of the county offices will go to a black. Of course, it will be impossible to elect one, but that matter can be attended to afterward. With the two nigger townships solid we have a working majority of about one hundred—pretty close, and might be easily swayed as the Democrats have been warming up to them lately."

"But how about the Populists? Will they be apt to fuse with the Dems?"

"Fuse, the devil! Might as well attempt to mix

oil and water as to fuse those bewhiskered gents from Kansas with Southern Democrats. You see, the Jayhawkers haven't forgotten Quantrell and his raiders, and, you bet, I'm having the editor of my paper, the Ossineke *Eagle*, keep Quantrell and the murdered Kansans before their eyes as much as possible."

The young Kansan removed the cigar from between his teeth and smiled coldly, and then:

"The war is over, Bill, I know; but this sectional stuff still makes good thunder at times, doesn't it?"

"Yes, John, keep it up; it's good thunder, as you say. We must have a member of the legislature from your county to add to our present scant majority—that's why I had inserted in the bill forming your county a proviso, calling for an election in the county this fall, though it's an off year."

Jack chuckled. In the virility of his youth he was bubbling over with self-confidence.

"Don't worry, Bill; just leave it to me," he said assuredly. "The worst the result can be is a close vote in favor of the other side; and if it does—well, we have a way of overcoming that difficulty, haven't we, Bill?"

"I guess we have the system, all right. By the way, have you met Jim Faulkner, here—'Honest Jim'—from over in the short-grass country? Shake hands, Jim, with Mr. Morrison, the young war horse from over in the new county in the Strip."

The boss arose from his chair and moved over to where a number of newly appointed Federal officials were having a heart-to-heart talk, leaving Jack with the tall, red-haired "Honest Jim" Faulkner.

The offices were crowded with political henchmen

from all over the territory—carpetbaggers of the new regime, Indian agents, country newspapermen fattening off of land office patronage, postmasters, and a sprinkling of negroes. Notwithstanding the torrid night, the windows were kept closed, for this was a star chamber session. The cigar smoke became so dense that Jones, an abstainer from the use of the weed, was compelled to find a few seconds' relief in the hall.

"Well, Morrison," remarked "Honest Jim" as the two became seated, "how's your county going this fall? We're all very much interested. Rebels pretty thick over there?"

"Yes, we've a hell of a lot of Texans and Arkansawyers, but, as I just told Bill—"

He moved his chair closer to Faulkner in order that none of the Ethiopian contingent might hear.

"Our only hope lies in the black townships; the nigger vote controls the balance of power with us."

Faulkner was of the kind that never laughed, but he smiled slightly.

"Now, I might give you some advice on how to handle that nigger vote, young man—we have the same situation over in our county," he ventured.

"Go ahead. Let's hear how you do it."

Jack listened attentively.

"Promise them anything and everything. Keep before them continually the fact that the Republican party is the party of Lincoln, the Emancipator—the party that freed them. Put one on your county ticket whether you elect him or not. Above everything else keep alive this Civil War stuff—it's good thunder—

but, if they get sulky and everything else fails, my boy—"

Reaching forward he patted Jack on the knee with the tips of his fingers—

"Remember, if everything else fails—"

Faulkner straightened up in his chair and took in a deep breath of smoky air—

"Scare hell out of 'em!"

Coincident with these words he brought his bony fist down with a bang upon the arm of his chair.

Jack spoke up instantaneously:

"That's just what I had in mind right along, Faulkner; just what I had in mind right along."

"Honest Jim" was taken by surprise. He, the battle-scarred veteran of many a political battle, found that he could not teach the doughty young banker anything new in the game.

"Well, to change the subject, Jack, how's the new town of Ossineke coming?"

"Fine and dandy, Faulkner—fifteen hundred people now and that number will double by fall. They're coming in from all directions. But I've made a clean-up on real estate there—boom? Well, I should say it was a boom." His eyes twinkled merrily.

"Glad to hear it, Morrison; glad to hear it. I expect I'll have to make my wad off of politics as I don't know very much about the real estate game—listen! I believe Jones is going to call the meeting to order."

Conversations about the room ended abruptly and chairs were turned about that the occupants might face Bill Jones, who stood at the end of a long table, obese, erect and every inch a boss. He commanded the meeting to come to order, by rapping his knuckles on

the mahogany to attract attention. He then started out on what he announced was to be a few preliminary remarks but which, before it ended, was a full-fledged political speech, thoroughly aflame with intense partizanship. With the eloquence of a Patrick Henry he figuratively wrapped the Stars and Stripes about him like a Roman senator his toga, as he renewed his allegiance to the Grand Old Party and flaunted in the face of his listeners the bloody shirt of the past.

The effect was thrilling; the denouement was marked by loud applause and some even arose in their seats and cheered.

Then followed strong party speeches by others. Before closing, Boss Jones remarked:

"We would like to hear from the young gentleman from the new county, Mr. Morrison. That county is to have an election this fall; perhaps he can give us some idea of the political situation there."

While verbose in conversation, John Henry Morrison was anything but an orator in public. He knocked the ashes from his cigar and slowly arose from his chair.

"Gentlemen," he stammered out, "as a representative from the new county, all that I have to say is that it is going Republican from top to bottom. I'm ready to spend my last cent and work day and night to bring it into the fold. That's all I have to say, gentlemen."

"Mr. Morrison will not have to spend his last cent," followed Jones. "A motion will be in order to the effect that the territorial central committee raise money to assist in making the new county Republican from the start. Do I hear a motion?"

A sum, large for those days, was voted to be turned over to Jack, who was instructed to use it toward defraying the expenses of the campaign soon to follow in the new county.

After the meeting had adjourned, Jack left Guthrie on the midnight train for Ossineke, supreme in his confidence in what money would do in keeping the political complexion of his county "right."

CHAPTER XI

THE OPPOSITION LAUNCHES A NEWSPAPER

OLONEL JOHNSON De FORREST was sitting outdoors on the shady side of his house one hot afternoon, the only place on his farm where he could escape Sol's blazing shafts. His pipe had dropped to the ground, and with his chair tilted backward against the side of the building he dozed languidly, his head fallen forward on his chest. In the nearby fields Beauregard could be heard commanding the mules as he and his sister were cultivating a patch of cotton.

Gradually sleep overcame the veteran of the Southland until he was snoring in rasping tones. He failed to hear the "whoa" of a driver as a team, hitched to a wagon, stopped at the gate. Neither did he realize that a visitor approached until he was awakened by a friendly slap on the shoulder, startling him so that he nearly fell face downward from the chair.

"Kunnel! Kunnel!" were the awakening words. "I done have somethin' heah t' show yo'-all."

"Egad! but yo' skeered me. What's th' mattah, anyhow? What's th' mattah?" Colonel De Forrest spoke rapidly and excitedly.

Colonel Clarence Williams, a man in the vivacity of the forties, attired in a black slouch hat and wearing a dark brown goatee, stood before the elder colonel, holding a newspaper rolled in his hand. While a farmer, he incidentally practiced law and was the recognized leader of the Democratic party of the county. He was laughing heartily.

"Sorry t' disturb yo' dreams, kunnel; but I shore

have somethin' heah that'll interest yo'. It's a copy of th' new Democratic papah that has done been sta'ted at Ossineke. It'll shore make Jack Mo'son an' his *Eagle* go a right sma't hickory, it will."

The elderly man was now fully awakened. He reached down by his side and picked up his cane.

"Yo' don' say so!" he exclaimed.

"Yeah, jus' take a look at it."

Williams opened the sheet and held up the front page before Colonel De Forrest.

"Reckon I can't read it without my specs," remarked the old man as he scrutinized the paper held before him. "Oh, yeah: I see th' name, th' *Ossineke Democrat.* Well, well! That's shore a good name for it."

"Yeah, it shore is, kunnel. Some o' the boys done wanted t' name it *The Southerner*, an' some *The Rebel*, being' as Mo'son an' his Jayhawkers insist on wavin' th' bloody shirt, but I done tol' them that might drive away the Nawth'n Democrats—yo'-all know what I mean—those coppah-heads, as we call 'em, from th' pa'ty, an' that wouldn't do, bein' as th' county's goin' t' be close, anyhow. Of cou'se, we didn't want t' fight on old wah-time issues, but bein' as they done sta'ted it, we must pick up the gauntlet, suh; we must pick up the gauntlet."

Colonel De Forrest was now trembling with belligerency. Raising his cane aloft, he exclaimed excitedly:

"Yes, suh; we-all will show them th' old South still knows how to fight, I reckon."

"I done hired a Missourian fo' editah," elucidated Williams—"a died-in-th'-wool Missouri Democrat—one of th' unterrified, intrepid kind, an' no niggah lovah

at that. He jus' enjoys a fight, he does, an' I pity Jack Mo'son an' his *Eagle* when he gets aftah him. Shall I read the salutatory t' yo', kunnel, bein' as yo' done have no glasses with yo'?"

"Yeah," answered the old man, eagerly; "go ahead an' read."

Williams, seating himself on his heels beside his senior, turned over to the editorial page of the *Democrat* and read the announcement underneath the subhead:

> "In launching the *Ossineke Democrat* upon the sea of journalism, the publishers fully realize the responsibilities that go with the venture. That the *Democrat* will fill a long-felt want is quite apparent. That our contemporary, the *Eagle*, is but the mouthpiece of Dollar Mark Johnnie, is a well-established fact, and it is not a newspaper, but an organ.
>
> "The *Democrat* makes no great promises for the future, suffice to say that it will unflinchingly espouse the cause of the Democratic party and give its unstinted support to the Democratic candidates at the coming county and all future elections.
>
> "Furthermore, the *Democrat* is ready to accept the challenge on any issue the *Eagle* or its backers may bring forth.
>
> "Come ahead, Mr. Morrison. 'Lay on MacDuff, and damned be he who first cries "Hold! Enough!" ' "

The old veteran's eyes illumined as the challenge was read.

"Good! good!" he exclaimed. "Though times are ha'd, yo'-all may put me down as a subscribah."

"Yeah, kunnel, I'll admit times are mighty ha'd with all of us. We done had a ha'd time raising enough money t' sta't th' papah, but we-all managed t' get enough togethah t' buy an' old hand press an' a shirt-tail full o' type, as th' printers say. But it's shore goin' t' be a go, kunnel, even if we have Jack Mo'son an' all his money t' fight."

Colonel Williams grasped Colonel De Forrest by the hand, lifted him to his feet and patted him affectionately between the shoulders.

"Now that th' *Eagle* has done called us 'rebels,' kunnel," he added, "we might as well have th' game as th' name. As 'rebels' we'll show 'em we can fight as only South'nahs know how t' fight, won't we?"

"Egad! kunnel, I reckon I'm as loyal to th' old flag since I surrendered as Jack Mo'son nor anyone else; but if those Jayhawkers done want t' heah that old rebel yell once mo', they shore ken heah it. But, by th' way, suh; how does th' county stand?" asked the elder one.

"Assuming that th' two niggah townships go Republican, they have a slight majo'ty, as neah as I ken figgah, but some th' Republicans done want t' make th' ticket lily-white an' say they won't vote fo' a damned niggah, nohow. If their ticket be lily-white, yo' see, then th' niggahs will be mad an' bolt; if they put a niggah on th' ticket, then some th' lily-whites will be mad an' vote with us. So there yo' have it—it's up t' the damned niggahs. I'll bid yo'-all good-bye—"

With these words, Colonel Williams was about to leave.

"But, suh, befo' yo'-all go, kunnel, I reckon we mustn't let th' damned niggahs vote; yo'-all recollect we didn't let 'em vote in our county in A'kansaw, did we?"

The younger colonel was fully aware of the elder's childishness. He once more patted him on the shoulders and remarked with a laugh:

"I reckon, suh, yo've done forgotten this is not a state; we're all undah United States gov'ment in these pa'ts; we can't do as we please with th' niggahs, yo' understand? Good-bye, kunnel."

The parting handshake was warm and hearty, followed by Williams' brisk departure to the wagon. Colonel De Forrest stood for a moment staring in the direction of the departing vehicle.

"Undah United States gov'ment, eh?" he mumbled. "Mo' ca'petbaggahs; an' I done reckoned all these yeahs that reconstruction was all ovah."

He turned about and limped back to the chair where he again seated himself. Then leaning forward, his hand resting on the crook of his cane, he muttered:

"It's all up t' th' damned niggahs, eh?"

CHAPTER XII

WHITE SUPREMACY PREVAILS

THE advent of the *Ossineke Democrat* in the local newspaper field in opposition to Jack Morrison's Republican *Eagle* was the signal for the commencement of one of the hottest political campaigns of the many that were common in the new territory in the early days.

The first number was a challenge by the Democrats to Jack, his fancied Republican majority and his own and the wealth of the powerful territorial committee back of him. Party lines were distinctly drawn and the feeling became more bitter every day.

Fistic arguments were of diurnal occurrence, and occasionally a saloon was emptied of its human contents as one or more shots sounded the doom of some oversanguine partisan. Arrests would follow, though the jury was as apt to acquit the murderer as to convict him—depending largely on the political affiliations of the defendant and the complexion of the twelve men good and true.

A passage-at-arms was entered into between the two newspapers. First, it was along party issues; then the ghost of the past was flaunted and the war between the states literally fought over again, finally simmering down to personal vituperations directed by each newspaper against the backers of the other.

The defiant editorial directed against Jack Morrison in the initial number of the *Democrat* was treated by the self-assumed county boss with disdain. With all his wealth and influence he felt immune from any attacks that might be launched against him by the

enemy. But the Missourian had a sarcastic pen—one that was extremely cutting. A fortnight or two after the inception of the *Democrat* found the banker a trifle irritated, and as the paper kept up the onslaught he gradually became vindictive. He tried, with all the influence he could bring to bear, to have the sheet boycotted, but it still remained, bold, defiant and irrepressible. The best he could do was to have the *Eagle* reply to the fusillade.

Shortly before the date of the county convention, Jack held a secret conference with Barks and two or three more of his satellites, and a ready-made county ticket was outlined. It provided for a negro to fill the office of county clerk, which was expected to palliate the black belt, the remainder of the ticket to be lily-white. The convention was to be a mere ratification meeting.

The convention was held in the temporary court house in Ossineke. Before the meeting was called to order, the court room was filled with hand-picked delegates from the various townships, greeting one another with handshakes, puffing black stogies, telling stories and discussing the coming campaign generally. Intense enthusiasm and confidence prevailed.

At the appointed time, Jack Morrison mounted the rostrum and called the convention to order, had the secretary read the call and stated the purpose of the meeting. The boss had the ever-handy Barks at his side to fill the oratorical needs of the occasion. And the fluent Barks was equal to the role assigned him.

Ascending the rostrum amid cheers, the gambler at once soared into the empyrean of elocutionary pyrotechnics.

"Once more," he said after the demonstration ceased, "the serpent of disloyalty has seen fit to raise its head in this fair, God-favored new county of ours; and once more the Grand Old Party has arisen to the occasion as it did in the eventful days of the sixties, and will crush forever by the weight of ballots, on November next, that self-same spirit that dominates the Democratic party in this county today. In the name of the Immortal Lincoln, I urge all of you patriotic Americans into whose faces I am now looking to put on the armor of loyalty and once more enlist under the glorious Stars and Stripes."

After pausing until the applause subsided, Barks continued:

"I was a mere boy when the war was on, but know something of its ravages. Well do I remember the scene at Lawrence when the rebel guerilla, Quantrell, visited the town. As I look backward through the mists of the past I see my father and mother lying in cold blood, the victim of rebel assasins; I see our old home at Lawrence in flames. Have I forgotten those scenes? No, nor never will. I tell you, fellow citizens, the Democratic party in this county is not to be trusted as long as it is controlled by the rebel element."

Looking down upon the colored delegation who occupied a "place of honor" in the front row of seats, the spokesman continued:

"And you, my colored friends; you, on whose backs are the scars of slavery; you, some of whom remember the auction block, who was it that broke the shackles and set you free? Wasn't it the great and glorious R-r-r-republican party? Then to that party you owe a debt of gratitude which, by the expressions on your

honest, intelligent countenances, I know you will repay by voting the straight Republican ticket next November."

He leaned forward over the edge of the platform, resting his hands on his knees.

"Now, won't you?" he asked.

The negroes grinned and mechanically nodded assent.

Barks continued for several minutes waxing eloquently and was followed by shorter speeches by others, all imbued with the same partisan fervor. Then the convention got down to business. Committees were appointed, and in due time they reported, after which came in order the nominations for a representative to the legislature and the various county offices.

Not expecting any insurgency, Jack allowed all nominations to be made by ballot, otherwise they might have a cut-and-dried appearance. Lo and behold, however, when the balloting had been completed it was found that the entire ticket was as immaculate as the eternal snows!

The boss, nevertheless, very cleverly subdued any feeling of resentment over the apparent insubordination, and with his perpetual smile, proposed three cheers for the success of the ticket, which was given and the meeting adjourned.

"Somebody has raised hell," he confided to Barks after the convention.

"They certainly have, Jack, but what do you propose to do in case the niggers get sore?"

"Scare the devil out of 'em, damn it; scare the devil out of 'em."

As was anticipated by many, it was not long after

the convention until there arose from the black townships disgruntled rumblings. An atmosphere of revolt overhung the two precincts and the African vote threatened to go over to the opposition en masse.

Jack had been expecting such a move, and when it asserted itself boldly he called a conference of his henchmen, which included a number of the colored leaders. The negroes were made flattering promises if they would remain in line; all manner of excuses were advanced for the failure to put a black man on the ticket and all the honeyed words to be found in a campaigner's vocabulary were summoned by Jack and his white associates in an endeavor to convince them that the Republican party was the only party friendly to the negro as it was in the days of Lincoln.

The colored contingent, nevertheless, remained obdurate, and after all other efforts to keep them within the fold failed, Jack's smiling, smoke-wreathed countenance changed. He was no longer the oily-tongued politician.

Instantly the cigar went to the floor with a force that caused the wrapper to peel off and the ashes to leave a trail of white as it rolled under the table. Making himself appear as angry as possible, the Kansan brought his clenched fist down on the table with a force that caused the windows to rattle, and the unexpected change of mien on the part of the boss startled the white men almost as much as it did the blacks.

The Aryan mind, though, was quick to reason out the motive of such a threatening demonstration, but the negroes remained fearful. It was the ever-dominant spirit of the white over the colored—the same spirit that maintains the relative status of the races

in the South—the psychological triumph of the Caucasian. In the eyes of the white man shone the light of thousands of years of civilization; in those of the black but the evolution of a century.

Turning to the African leader beside him, Jack menacingly asked, as he looked straight at him with his penetrating, gray orbs:

"Do you mean to say that you niggers will not support the Republican ticket from top to bottom?"

The colored man rolled his eyes nervously right and left to evade the ones that reflected the dominant soul of Jack Morrison, and as the white men appeared to smile approval of their chairman's actions, the negro, cowed, wiggled about in his chair in an effort to get out of range of the orbs which he felt were looking a hole through him.

"Yes, sah, we do," finally replied the ebony spokesman, summoning all the courage he had within him.

"Then, damn you," demanded Jack, as he reached over and tapped the negro on the shoulder, causing him to recoil, "if your two townships don't roll up straight Republican votes to the number of every nigger voter in them, then we'll run every blamed one of you out of the county. This meeting is now adjourned."

The white men followed Jack as he left the room, but the negroes remained for a time in their places, stupefied and dazed. There were in their number men who remembered the Ku Klux Klan. Before coming to Oklahoma they had been made submissive to the Southern white, but now, for the first time, they had encountered a white man from the North in a similar role—a leader in the political party which they had been told again and again was the party of the Great

Emancipator—a leader equally as domineering as his blood brothers in Arkansas and Texas.

Slowly and sullenly they left the room, one by one, pondering over the events of the evening, subdued and submissive. As they were leaving, one whispered to another:

"This shuah am a white man's country, ain't it?"

"It shuah am," was added.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEBUT IS PLANNED

HE long, dry, hot summer of Oklahoma had passed and the sun's rays beat down upon the yellow stubbled wheat fields and acres of corn and cotton at a more obtuse angle. The drouth had made the wheat crop a minimum one; the corn was a trifle more prolific, but the cotton balls that were bursting forth in large snowy tufts indicated an exceptionally good year for the growers of that staple. Already the compresses and round-bale gins were humming with activity, and the streets of Ossineke, which had shown but little life under the torrid July and August suns, now were bustling with renewed vigor. Every day, wagons loaded with fleecy bales and drawn by long-eared Missouri mules, dodged right and left as they made their way up and down the streets. Cotton buyers mingled with the vehicles, halted the drivers as they came into town, sampled the cotton and vied with each other in offering the best quotations for the product.

As a result of the bumper crop, business places thrived. Well-dressed sharks—experts in their profession—made the saloons their headquarters where they induced unsophisticated farmers who came there to cash their cotton checks and indulge in a little convivality to enter into a friendly game in which the cotton grower was prevented from becoming over-opulent. Ossineke was a wide-open town and nearly everything was tolerated.

The De Forrest family, along with others of the Southern settlers who devoted most of their holdings

to cotton, were rejoicing over the good crop. Too poor to hire help, Beauregard and his sister labored by themselves among the bushes, plucking the fleece as fast as the over-ripe balls burst. When sufficient was picked for a load, Gardy would hitch up the mules and take the cargo to the nearest gin, where the seed was removed and the cotton rolled up in a neat round bale or compressed. Prices were better than they had been in former years, and it was not many weeks after the season opened that the De Forrests were indulging in some of the luxuries they had heretofore been denied. Gardy blossomed forth in a new "store" suit of clothes and a new broad-rimmed slouch hat. Wagon yard society was scorned and he longed to associate with the town people more. He would show the ornery Jayhawkers what a Southern gentleman could be!

The chilling autumn breeze was blowing down from Kansas one afternoon, while Gardy and Laura were plucking cotton in the fields, causing the girl's blow-away black hair to sway across her face and annoyingly cover her entrancing eyes.

The two were discussing an "acquaintance social," a great event to occur at the South Jerusalem church during the coming week. To Laura, it was to be, in a way, her debut, as she was blossoming into womanhood, and the two planned on using the proceeds of the sale of cotton that Saturday in buying a number of luxuries and necessities, among others, a new gown to be worn at the event by Laura.

"I reckon yo'-all will look right sma't in that thar new dress, sistah," remarked Gardy, as he emptied his gunnysack into a nearby basket.

"Anyhow, brothah, I'm goin' to get somethin' nice,

an' I want yo' t' go t' town with me Monday an' help me pick it out. Yo' all know I've not been goin' t' many sociables lately, 'cause I couldn't dress as good as some th' othah gals. But we-all will have plenty of money aftah th' cotton is done sold, an' if daddy doesn't get any wuss we ken go into society some."

"Uh-hum," answered the brother, as he covered a large area of the nearby earth with saliva. "I'm goin' t' th' bank this evenin' an' pull out all th' money we have thar so as we ken buy as we want. Yeah, an' we-all will show them fellahs from the Nawth a thing or two, I reckon, won't we?"

"Them fellahs from th' Nawth, Gardy; they are so bold. Why, one o' them was right sma't enough t' speak t' me aftah church, 'tothah night, an' I never have been interjuced t' him."

Her dark eyes shone with a sense of resentment.

"Who was th' fellah?" instantly spoke up the brother, a trifle faster than in his usual tempo. Squaring his broad shoulders he instinctively grasped at his hip pocket for something.

"Reckon one of them thar Jayhawkers done insulted you, sis?'

"No, not as bad as that," she replied, throwing her hair back from her eyes which had ceased to shoot forth shafts of defiance and glistened merrily. Then with a laugh, she continued:

"Them Nawth'n fellahs are so lively an' jolly, though, an' some are shore right han'some."

Gardy's jaws stopped working on a fresh cud of Horseshoe and he stared at his sister in amazement. She continued to walk from vine to vine, stopping occasionally to brush aside a lock of shining black from

features that radiated through a coat of wind-tan—the exultation of a soul made happy by the prospects of an early debut—the one great event in a maiden's life, whether she be the pampered daughter of a money king or the wholesome, innocent maid from the Ozarks.

Gardy held his cud in abeyance as he marvelled at his sister's compliment to the Jayhawkers. As for himself, he had so far failed to find anything in the Yankees to overcome the prejudice instilled into him from his youth.

"Reckon that thar Jack Mo'son will soon own th' hull kentry," he finally remarked, in order to show his aversion for the ringleader of the Kansans.

"Why, brothah?" asked Laura, as she became interested enough to stop picking.

"Don't yo' know that he's th' fellah that done tried to take this place away from us, saying' we'uns was Soonahs an' it wasn't ours? An' don't yo'-all know that he has done fo'closed his plasters on a hull lot o' th' fa'ms in these heah pa'ts? He has, but I reckon he'll nevah get a hold on this heah plantation."

After spitting profusely between the branches of a cotton plant, he continued, angrily:

"Reckon those Jayhawkers would like t' run th' hull kentry."

"I nevah been interjuced t' him, brothah, an' I reckon I nevah will, 'cause he's rich an' stuck-up like all th' rich niggah lovahs."

"Niggah lovahs is right, sis; he's a scalawag Republican like a lot o' them thar Jayhawkers an' say that a niggah is as good as a white man so long as he behave hisself. Reckon he wouldn't live in Mount Zion long an' talk like that."

"But we'-all arn't in Mount Zion now, Gardy, an' I reckon don't want t' go back thar."

Gardy suspended chewing again and stared at his sister, amazed at her intense appreciation of their new home in the territory.

Laura continued her work, happily singing in the meantime. Beauregard said no more; he was not generally of a loquacious turn of mind.

After a wagon load of the fleece had been picked, Gardy hitched the mules to the conveyance. Then retiring to the house for a few minutes where he attired himself in his new clothes, started for Ossineke with his load.

Laura waved him good-bye as he drove through the gate.

"Take keer yo'self, Gardy," she cried.

"Reckon yo'-all will have that new dress, sis, fo' th' sociable. Giddap, thar," and the mules started on a trot down the road.

Laura watched the wagon until it disappeared well in the distance. Then she went inside the house to join her father, singing joyfully a Southern melody as she thought of the new gown and the coming church social was uppermost in her mind.

CHAPTER XIV

GARDY BECOMES A SENATOR

MOST of the saloons in Ossineke, like those of nearly all the new towns in the Southwest at that time, were of a low order, but the well-lighted front, an elaborate mahogany bar and other furnishings equally expensive distinguished the Senate from the other liquor houses about the town. The Senate, as its name indicated, was the club of the town's elite. Cowpunchers, ranch help and the like were seldom found in this aristocratic place, but instead, business men, politicians, professional men, large ranch owners—patricians from around about met in the Senate to gather about card tables in richly furnished booths and sip the brew of corn and barley.

Beauregard De Forrest marketed his load of cotton, took his check to the Farmers & Merchants Bank where he had it cashed and "pulled out," all he had on deposit, some one hundred and sixty dollars. To him, it was a stupendous amount and the withdrawal of such a sum from the bank caused him to chuckle, thinking that it was going to bring to Jack Morrison and his financial institution no end of embarrassment.

Attired in his new "store" suit of clothes he strutted up one side of Main street and down the other, stopping only in front of shop windows where were displayed samples of dress goods which he thought might be ideal for Laura.

With an unusual good meal within him obtained at the Farmers' restaurant, Gardy, in his own estimation, was rated A-1 in the mercantile agencies. Kansas cattlemen, their spurs jingling and the red bandana

handkerchiefs about their necks reflecting crimson in the westering sun, turned about and smiled as he passed. In front of every saloon was a motley crowd, shirt-sleeved and collarless, enjoying the cool evening air and drinking from beer bottles and buckets. On corners, sombreroed Mexicans dispensed chile con carne and tomales from carts, giving the air a peppery odor. Blanket Indians, from the nearby reservation, lounged about on the sidewalk edges, smoking cigarets.

Gardy heeded none—not even the smooth-looking cappers who scented easy game in the Arkansawyer and profusely invited him to step inside and have a drink.

"Reckon I'm goin' t' th' Senate," he abruptly replied to each one. The one hundred and sixty entitled him to a throne among the gods.

Arriving in front of the Senate, Gardy hesitated and peered through the wide-open door, and then, with his hands in his pockets, one grasping the precious roll, he gaped at the sputtering arc light that overhung the threshold.

He reckoned this was the place, all right, and as he beheld the elaborate interior he was for a moment dazed. He had never seen anything like it before; to him it was the Valhalla of his dreams—a Palace of Wonders. He then withdrew to the edge of the sidewalk, his mouth wide open, cogitating on whether to venture within. In doing so, his hand grasped the roll of currency once more, and then the decision was immediate.

The saloon was crowded, like most of the places of amusement that evening, as Gardy strutted to the end of the bar and ordered a mug of the malted beverage.

The bartender, busily engaged in wiping the suds from the top of the counter, at first was oblivious to the Arkansawyer's presence, until the negro bottle washer called his attention to the newcomer. The dispenser looked askance at Gardy, and as the young farmer repeated the order, smiled.

A well-dressed crowd lined the bar. The gentleman nearest Gardy turned about, sized him from head to boots, grinned, and then about facing, remarked to a companion, which Gardy failed to hear, or if he did hear, did not comprehend its meaning:

"Someone must have left the wagon yard gate open this evening."

At which the other laid down his stein, looked at the Arkansawyer, who was gulping down the contents of a mug, and hunched the fellow next to him, until it was passed down the line that a new feature was on the boards for the evening.

Gardy grunted satisfaction as he laid the empty glass down on the bar and turned about to find the line-up of customers scrutinizing him closely and smiling. At the opposite end, chewing the stub of a cigar and squinting merrily out of his foxy eyes, was Jack Morrison—Jack Morrison whom Gardy despised most of all Jayhawkers—Morrison, who had contested his homestead, the nigger lover and Kansas politician. Had one drink been sufficient to madden him, the Arkansawyer would have reached for his six-shooter.

Gardy scowled at the sight of the banker, but now that he was a man of means he must play the part. Slamming down a ten dollar bill and tilting his head proudly, he looked over the faces of the line-up.

"Have one on me, gents," was his bold invitation,

as he rested a foot on the brass railing. The offer was accepted, glasses were raised and the hospitality of the newcomer toasted.

Gardy felt a glow of pride that the cold suds right off the ice could not dampen; he was in the Senate, soaring among the senators. And why should he not when his was one of the distinguished families of the Old South and his father bore the civilian rank of colonel? He felt that his family was coming into its own in social recognition.

The bartender pressed a key on the cash register, a bell rang and the till shot outward. Laying the ten on top of others of the same denomination, he picked up a five, several small pieces of silver, and slapped the change down in a heap on the glistening, foam-spattered surface of the bar.

It was the oft-worked game of the profession. If the purchaser was sober enough to realize that the change was short, he called it to the attention of the clerk and the "mistake" was rectified. If not, well and good—the till was enriched that amount.

Gardy was, as yet, perfectly sober, but he chucked the change in one lump into his pocket, not noticing the shortage of two dollars. He likewise failed to notice, after he had displayed the roll, Jack Morrison calling one of the crowd aside and having a confidential talk with him.

The banker realized that a farmer relieved of his surplus funds is very apt to mortgage his farm, and the mortgage held by the bank not only drew good interest, but if foreclosed meant the acquisition of property that was rapidly increasing in value. And Jack had a system whereby he managed to secure possession

of the property one way or the other. Though it was not generally known, Jack was the self-same owner of the Senate saloon.

To Barks, Gardy was apparently an easy victim, and as he took the cue given by the banker, ambled over to the end of the bar where stood the Arkansawyer and proceeded to make himself acquainted.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting you," assured Barks, thrusting his soft, white fingers around the young man's rugged hand and looking innocently into his eyes.

"Reckon yo'-all haven't," replied the Southerner.

"My name is Barks; what may yours be?"

"Beauregard De Forrest, suh," came the proud answer.

"This is indeed a pleasure," added the smooth one—"a pleasure to meet a scion of one of the old Southern families whom I take you to be."

The wheedling made Gardy's eyes bulge with astonishment.

Laying one hand on the Southerner's shoulder and the other on the bar, Barks continued:

"I'm a Yankee, as you are undoubtedly aware by the way I talk, but I have a high regard for the men who fought for the South, although my father served on the Union side. But, for me, the war is over; I know no dividing line. I have come to the conclusion that the South was right on the race question, and if the war was to be fought over again, I think I would be somewhat of a rebel myself."

Gardy's astonishment increased. Here was a type of the hated Kansan he had never seen before! He felt himself warming up to the card man. Surely,

this man was a Northerner who was not so bad, after all! Credulous, he believed everything the gambler was telling him. Besides, the smooth one was well dressed and must be a gentleman. The Southerner felt assured that the man was one of influence whose friendship would be essential in securing for himself and his family the social recognition he thought was justly theirs.

Southern hospitality now knew no bounds and the drinks were again on Beauregard De Forrest, he, himself, selecting a cigar instead.

"A cigar?" Barks interposed, looking astonished. "Why, can't you stand another super? Come, be a good sport?"

Gardy, however, was a moderate drinker. Reared in the environments of the Baptist church, he knew not the taste of intoxicants until he came to Oklahoma. Even then, he hesitated before succumbing to the social glass, but never indulged to excess. His equilibrium was always preserved.

To Barks, it was a keen disappointment not to inveigle Gardy into imbibing to a greater extent, and he unconsciously frowned. His victims had always been more easily handled while under the influence of liquor, and Gardy's refusal was a new phase in the situation which he had not counted on. He insisted in the name of good fellowship on the young man having another glass, but the farmer was obstinate.

"Nope, I reckon I'll have a seegar." He was persistent in his decision to refrain from further drinking.

"Give him a cigar, then, Jim," ordered Barks to the bartender, with a slight twitch of one eye.

The dispenser, cognizant of what happens when a

bad cigar follows a few drinks on the part of a novice, handed Gardy one of the strongest brands in stock. The Arkansawyer stuck the weed in the center of his mouth, while Barks scratched a match on the sole of his highly polished shoe and lit it for him.

Gardy sucked away on the cigar, acquiring as much solace as though it had been a mild one of a better variety. While he inhaled great draughts of satisfaction and blew forth clouds of blue smoke in alternate succession, supers were raised simultaneously in a toast proposed by Barks to Beauregard De Forrest, the genuine exponent of Southern hospitality and the Prince of Good Fellows.

The Arkansawyer's eyes gleamed as the compliment was accorded him, and drawing in his cheeks, exhaled a mushroom-shaped cloud to the ceiling. He was the Prince of Good Fellows, whatever that meant—a title conferred upon him in the Senate and recognized by all the senators present, of whom Barks was evidently the presiding officer.

Jack stepped up behind Barks and whispered into his ear:

"You've got him coming; get him into a game."

The hilarious party present, desiring to make the rounds of other resorts in their regular Saturday night orgie, filed out of the saloon, some stopping to shake hands with Gardy, while others passed him without notice. There remained among the patrons only Jack, Barks and Gardy.

The banker, feeling that Barks had his intended victim well under control, grasped the hand of the youth warmly, smiled behind the ever-present cigar and poured into his ears such mellifluous words, ex-

pressing his pleasure at their meeting, that the younger De Forrest forgot all about the homestead contest and felt himself transported to realms ethereal. With the excuse that he had some important business to attend to, Jack left the place, and to him the name of De Forrest was soon dissolved in the maze of big business.

Gardy, now the Prince of Good Fellows, was left to the mercy of Barks.

"You are certainly a good fellow and I like your appearance," flatteringly remarked the card man. "Let's go into the booth here and have a visit."

"Reckon I'll have t' be goin' home right sma't soon, as I done promised Laura I wouldn't stay out late tonight."

But the gambler was insistent and Gardy finally accepted the invitation to remain for a brief time longer. He followed Barks into the nearest booth.

The place, artistically furnished, was in keeping with the main room of the Senate. The painting of a nude woman on the wall caused Gardy to temporarily recede, but he was soon lost in the Land of Wonders as he eyed the round mahogany table and the four limousined chairs that fitted cosily into the place.

Gardy was intensely absorbed in his surroundings, and when Barks invited him to have a chair, he fell into it mechanically. He was confident of his ability to take care of himself in case of an emergency, especially placing stress on his dexterity in handling a certain piece of hardware which he always carried in his hip pocket.

Barks used every means of persuasion that a man of his smooth personality had in store in his efforts to

induce Gardy to drink once more, but the Southerner's determination to abstain from further indulging was as invulnerable as the granite on the Ozark hillsides.

The card man became impatient and his mien betokened anger. His usual stoic expression gave place to a frown, and finally turning away from Gardy, he ejaculated an abrupt invitation:

"Have a cigar, then."

Barks now concluded that he could not get the Arkansawyer under his influence by the use of liquor, so, subduing any outward expression of chagrin, faced the lad from the Ozarks and began firing a broadside of flattery. Gardy, in replying, recited his whole career and that of his family. He proudly referred to his father's service in the Confederate army; their coming to Oklahoma, down to the time when his sister Laura was to appear in a "right sma't" new dress at the coming church "sociable."

Barks feigned intense interest, and expressed the hope that some time in the near future he would have the pleasure of meeting the remainder of such a distinguished family.

Beauregard found the card man magnetic and was drawn to Barks until he confided to him all his plans as well as the amount he had in his pocket when he entered the Senate. When he told of how he withdrew one hundred and sixty dollars from the bank, Barks' mind commenced to operate in a series of rapid deductions. Reaching for a deck of cards on the side of the table he nervously made it sputter as he rubbed his thumb over the celluloid edges. He kept the lad absorbed in conversation while he calculated that the lat-

ter, after having his evening meal and making due allowance for the bartender's short changing, there must be in Gardy's store trousers something like one hundred and forty dollars, at least. This conclusion he arrived at after having cleverly questioned Gardy as to what he had done with his money after he had left the bank. As soon as the result was attained in his mind, he slapped the card deck on the table with a thud.

"Let's have a game of cards, old timer," he suggested enthusiastically.

"Reckon I don't know how," assured the innocent Beauregard.

"Don't know how? Rats, poker is easy. I'll bet you're bluffing me. No? Well, I'll teach you and we'll just have a little friendly game."

The card man proceeded to shuffle the deck.

Gardy had been taking his initiatory degree in things new and wonderful all evening until his desire to learn more of the inner workings of the Senate became insatiable. He had forgotten about his promise to Laura to return home early that night and was more than eager to learn the game.

Barks explained the game in all its details, and after coaching his pupil for a hand or two, left him to work out his own salvation. Gardy became more and more enthused over the pastime as Barks allowed him to win several hands, the gambler intermittingly expressing his surprise at the successful manner in which the Arkansawyer handled the cards and predicting a bright future for him as a money maker. The blandiloquence found Gardy in a receptive mood, and the game became more fascinating to him than ever.

Gradually leading him on, Barks proposed a wager which Gardy was in a humor to accept. The first hand was won by the novice and his long, bony fingers raked in the pile of coin and bills. Then a larger amount was proposed. Beauregard accepted the challenge and won again. Five, and then ten dollar stakes were placed on the board and the Southerner continued winning until he was approximately one hundred dollars ahead.

Barks marvelled loudly at the luck of his opponent and remarked that he would soon have to quit playing. Gardy, however, did not notice the slight twinkle in the gambler's eye which was an indication that the tables were about to be turned. The novitiate was enthused and dreamed visions of great wealth. He thought of how he would return home that night with more ready cash than the De Forrest family had ever known.

The bright lights of the Senate reflected from the enameled pressed steel ceiling and shone down within the low partitions that marked the boundaries of the booth. From the barroom came a babel of voices, interspersed with oaths, laughter and stern admonitions from the bartender to some over-boisterous patron to make less noise—the Senate was an aristocratic place and there was to be no "rough house." Besides the increasing crowd filled the barroom and all available booths.

Gardy saw not, neither did he hear, but kept his eyes centered on the cards before him. Now the omnipotent cigar began to have its effect. His head became heavy and the spots on the cards danced; he was sick at his stomach.

For the first time since they started playing Barks won a hand and he reached with avidity for the money.

Another and another followed with the gambler still winning. The Arkansawyer, though, was still optimistic, Barks assuring him that his former streak of good luck would return, until his last ten dollars was laid on the table.

Gardy's sickness by this time took on the symptoms of dizziness; his face ashened and he began to choke. Then his head fell slowly forward as he peered through his brows at Barks. At last, he divined that he was being duped.

Gardy was revived in an instant. The flash in his dark eyes was like a lightning bolt in advance of a storm.

Psychologically, Barks realized the purpose of the young man. A convenient button on the wall behind him would extinguish the lights of the Senate; he would grasp the pile in the center of the table and be gone before his victim could draw a gun. It was a part of the oftworked game; he had done it with others.

He was about to reach for the button, when within the fraction of a second, the glistening barrel of a .45 flashed before his nose and simultaneously, long, bony Arkansas fingers reached forth and picked up the stakes. Creole eyes, centered on the gambler, glared over the barrel of the gun, causing him to wince.

"Reckon Laura is goin t' have a new dress outen this," came from behind the hammer already cocked.

The card man cooly arose from his seat, both hands behind him holding a death grip on the chair. Still facing Gardy, he pulled the chair out from behind him, and in doing so, succeeded in touching the button on the wall.

The lights were extinguished all over the place.

Barks dropped to the floor and two shots from Gardy's gun perforated the wall back of where the gambler stood. Instantaneously there was a lively scramble for the door of the Senate. As the first flash of the Arkansawyer's revolver lighted up the booth, the colored porter leaped through the front window, taking the pane with him. A mass of men blocked the doorway until it resembled a football scrimmage. Many feared a pistol duel and desired as soon as possible to get out of range of the bullets. The bartender dropped behind the counter and reached for his stubby repeater. Some, less excited than others and having received their baptism of fire at other times, remained where they were to walk leisurely out when the exit became clear.

Barks, who had fallen to his knees the moment the Senate became dark, crawled out through the door of the booth as the second bullet from Gardy's six-shooter whistled above him. Making his way out through the barroom, he was among the first to find himself in the street and was soon but an integral part of the Saturday night crowd.

From within the Senate, which was still dark, came a deep-throated bellowing like that of a raving animal within a cage. Barks, when he had crawled out of the booth, shut the door behind him. It was equipped to lock automatically on occasions of this kind.

"Lemme out, damn you," echoed over the moonlit prairie. The Arkansawyer had knocked over the table and chairs in his rage, and his eyes shone within the darkened enclosure like those of a bobcat in its den.

The demand for liberation went forth only twice,

when a muscle-padded shoulder went against the door of the booth with a force of one hundred and seventy pounds of rural bone and sinew, causing the panel of the door to split and the lock to tear loose from its settings. Gardy stumbled and fell from the force of the drive, but quickly recovered himself. He started for the moonlit threshold with the intention of plunging out into the street, his hand still squeezing tightly the butt of the gun which had created pandemonium in the Senate.

The liquor dispenser squinted over the top of the bar, watching the lad closely until he was half way to the door. Then reaching over with his left hand he turned a switch that instantly flooded the place with light and at the same moment covered the six-foot form before him with a gun.

Gardy suddenly faced the bartender and was about to raise his pistol, excited as he was, but there was something telepathically flashed from the eye of the clerk warning him to be discreet.

"Drop that gun, damn you; drop that gun, I say," roared the bartender, his lips parted and his teeth clenched.

Gardy's weapon bounded to the floor and his rage gave way to bewilderment. He stared at the man who seemed to have a superhuman power over him.

The man leaned over the counter and hissed in subdued, half-confidential words:

"Old man, you'd better duck out of the back door and hike home as fast as your shanks can carry you."

Gardy hesitated.

"Duck, I say," insisted the white-aproned personage. "Hang it, the police will be here in a minute and

pull you if you don't. Hike out the back door and get out of town as quick as you can."

It was the policy of the operators of the Senate to preclude any arrests, if possible, in their places, for fear of the stigma that might attach itself afterward. If neither of the contenders in a shooting affray were killed or injured, they were assisted in making their escape, the excitement subsided, and within a day or two the event would be the subject of conversation of no more import than an ordinary incident.

Gardy heeded the advice of the employe of the Senate, moved rapidly out the back door, and crunching broken bottles with his heavy boots, made his way through the stockade out into the alley in the rear.

Fortunately for him, the officers were engaged in looking after obstreperous drunks about the town when the shooting occurred. Attracted by the report of Gardy's pistol, they elbowed their way through the rabble to the Senate. There they searched every portion of the building and adjacent property; then disappeared among the crowd again without making further investigations.

In the meantime, two long-eared Missouri mules were being hastily hitched up in the wagon yard, and by the time the excited crowd had scattered and business was again normal at the Senate, the moon under a thin veil of gray that made it appear like a silver disc, shone down upon a rapidly moving vehicle. The rims of the wagon wheels, polished from continuous wear, formed glistening arches in the light of the lunar orb.

"Gelang, thar!" was the imperious exclamation of the driver, accompanied by a blow on the animal's rumps by the loose end of the reins. "Reckon Laura's shore goin' t' have that thar new dress."

CHAPTER XV

THE ACQUAINTANCE SOCIAL

PATTI SHANKS, daughter of the Reverend Charles Shanks of the North Jerusalem church of Ossineke, was sitting in the spacious parlor of the parsonage and reading a book by the light of a shaded lamp on the center table.

The autumn winds, heralding approaching winter, blew the dust and sand down the street in such volumes that the arc light on a nearby corner was at times obscured. Again the light would shine through the parlor window for a moment until another gust, generally in whirlpool form, would pick up small pebbles, whirl them about as if on a tangent until they reached the circumference of the air pool and rattled against the window pane. Then the wind would subside for a half minute, as if summoning reserve forces to be spent later in blowing up another cloud of debris. The morning glory vines suspended over the windows, withered and browned by the breath of autumn, rattled against the glass, the whole blending into a hideous chorus, weird, uncanny and uninviting. The effect of the tumult of the elements was chilly to one within the parsonage, though in the fireplace in the parlor glowed the embers of a scuttle of Choctaw coal as it radiated heat waves in an effort to offset both the material and psychological effects of the outside weather.

Patti Shanks, gowned ideal of the times, was restless. Shuddering as the elements without roared threateningly, she laid down the book, opened pages

downward. Then, as she arose from the rocker, threw a wrap over her shoulders and stepped to the large bay window that faced the street. She glanced up and down the sidewalk nervously while there was a lull in the sandstorm; then reached for the curtain and pulled it down with a force that cracked her knuckles on the lower sill. The pain of the blow on her finger joints—resulting also in a slight bruise—added to her irritation. After holding the injured member to her lips for a moment, she returned to the rocker, patted slightly her pompadour in several places, reinserted a hairpin; then resumed her reading.

Thrice did Patti lay aside the book and listen keenly, but only the phantom-like whistle of the winds and the pat-pat-pat of gravel on the porch were audible—confusing and misleading—sometimes resembling the sound of approaching footsteps. Picking up the book again, she frowned at the clock as if it were to blame for human shortcomings.

Patti finally slammed the book down on the table violently. Her brown, impulsive eyes seemingly penetrated the window curtain as if in search of something out in the storm; then again they were quickly diverted to the clock. A second glance at the dial, and the book again received attention, the pompadour affectionately caressed and the rocker started in a pendulum-like motion.

In the study adjoining the parlor the Reverend Shanks and his wife were absorbed in reading secular and religious periodicals. They were not so much aware of the passing of the time as their only daughter in the other room. The Reverend Shanks had little to

worry over; his flock and many others who contributed to the finances of the church were among the well-to-do element of the community. His salary was the largest and his parsonage more elaborate than that of any other pastor in the new county.

The heaviest contributor to the North Jerusalem church exchequer was Jack Morrison, and as a result, an intense friendship developed between the minister and the banker—a friendship of mutual advantage in that the reverend gentleman never found his salary lacking, and the banker discovered that his close relations with the minister and his own unstinted contributions to the collection plate covered up a multitude of sins. Furthermore, the Reverend Shanks looked forward to the time when he would bring John Henry Morrison within the folds of the church; and more especially were the pastor and his wife encouraging the attentions of the prosperous young financier to their only daughter, Patti—Patti, the product of an eastern seminary, gracious, charming, impulsive, designing. Perhaps to have the desirable bachelor banker enmeshed in Patti's charms would be of more import than to have him come penitent to the altar and affix his business-like signature to the rolls of the denomination.

The Reverend Shanks laid down his paper, yawned and glanced at his watch. Noting the hour, he removed his glasses and remarked to his wife:

"Isn't it about time, dear, that we were going to that acquaintance social at the South church? Patti can just as well wait for Mr. Morrison. I expect he has been detained on business."

"I rather think we had, Charles."

The wife arose from her chair, causing her silk gown to fluffle.

"I'm not particularly fond of going," she continued, "but I suppose those Southerners will be offended if we don't attend; they are so proud and sensitive, though most I've known haven't much of this world's goods to be proud over."

The pastor of the North Jerusalum church may have thought, at that moment, of the Man who had but a stone on which to rest his head; or his mind may have been absorbed in the tardiness of Jack Morrison who was to accompany the clerical family to the social. At all events, it would be unfair to judge, as he made no comment, but arose and rubbed the wrinkles out of his long, close-fitting frock.

Having but a block to go, the minister dispensed with his overcoat, but buttoned up his Prince Albert while his wife threw a shawl over her shoulders. Stepping out into the parlor they found Patti nervously startled by their sudden entry.

"Are you going now?" asked the Only Daughter, impetuously.

"Yes, Pat," answered the father, "we have decided not to wait any longer. You may as well remain and come with Mr. Morrison; we hope to see you at the social soon."

"You will if he ever gets here. I don't see what keeps him so late," Patti snapped, tartly.

"Oh, well," placated the Reverend Shanks, "you know he is a very busy man; he undoubtedly will be along soon."

The pastor and his wife left the Only Daughter biting her knuckles while they braved the storm on their way to the social.

* * *

The wife of the Reverend Charles Folsom, of the Jerusalem church, South, was not the triumph of ostentation that made the spouse of the North minister shine, as she stood at the head of the receiving line to greet the Reverend and Mrs. Shanks upon their arrival at the acquaintance social. Mrs. Folsom was attired plainly, and simplicity was likewise evident in her manner. Nevertheless, there was a genuine warmth in her handshake as she greeted Mrs. Shanks, while the North minister's wife ill-concealed her air of disdain upon meeting her Southern sister.

"Glad t' have yo'-all with us, Sistah Shanks—an' yo' too, brothah." She loosened the cold grip of Mrs. Shanks to grasp the hand of the reverend gentleman. The Reverend Shanks, tall and imposing, condescendingly accepted the felicitation.

The Reverend Folsom, not as prepossessing as the Northern divine, was a lank Tennessean, with a kindly facial mold and sympathetic eyes. He wore somewhat wrinkled clerical garb, his carelessly knotted tie covering the tips of a low collar—his entire appearance enough at variance with that of Reverend Shanks as to make the latter appear more attired for a reception in elite circles than at a church social.

He was at the other end of the church when the Reverend and Mrs. Shanks arrived, and noticing the eminent form of his brother clergyman near the door-

way, he hastened to join his wife in extending them a hearty welcome.

The social had been gotten up ostensibly to promote a better feeling among the factions in the community; the invitation to attend was general, consequently the little church was filled with many kinds of people.

Conspicuous among the number were Beauregard De Forest and his sister Laura. The cosmopolitan assemblage dazed the provincial Gardy, and he insisted on remaining close to the stove near the door, drinking in the kaleidoscopic scenes of vari-colored gowns as they moved up and down the aisles and between the pews—the profusion of handshakes—and listening to the blending of the soft, Southern vernacular with the harsher nasal twang, all of which he absorbed in open-mouthed wonderment. His store clothes fitted him loosely, and his large, red bow tie was conspicuous by its brilliancy.

Laura's appearance was distinct from that of her brother. The new gown fitted perfectly—the workmanship of the best modiste in Ossineke. The color effect, a beautiful pink, was especially appropriate. Besides, her flushed cheeks evidenced perfect health and her eyes beamed with delight—she enjoyed the scene and felt an unsurmountable desire to enter enthusiastically into the occasion. Dixie modesty and sisterly devotion only restrained her from leaving Gardy and mingling freely with the assemblage.

Soon there came to them a sister of the church who handed to each an elongated card, folded at one end and looped with a tiny ribbon. At the top of each card was printed:

MY NAME IS

WHAT IS YOURS?

and following at the bottom were several blank lines for the inscribing of signatures.

Gardy fumbled his card over and over with astonishment, not divining its purpose, until his sister's more alert mind come to his assistance.

Presently the rumbling of voices ceased and an air of silence pervaded the edifice. The center of attraction became the doorway as there entered Jack Morrison and Patti Shanks. Ordinary people might have passed down the receiving line without producing a spell over the assemblage, but there was something about Jack's personality and the *éclat* of Patti, attired semi-décolleté as she was, that diverted the attention of the more simple people from their social intercourse to the new arrivals. It was Jack Morrison, the richest man in town, and the minister's daughter who wore the most expensive gowns!

Laura De Forrest, unaccustomed to the show of finery that Miss Patti displayed—the attire more appropriate for a full dress ball—marvelled at the appearance of the Reverend Shanks' daughter. At first, she was enraptured, and, being feminine, longed for the time when she, too, could wear such lucent apparel; but a glance at the acuteness of the angle in the back of Patti's waist, as the Only Daughter turned about, shocked the Ozark maid until she slightly recoiled and placed her hand on Gardy's arm. The red hue of her cheeks spread to her dark hair, unused as she was to such undue exposure. Laura's admiration of Patti

gave place to disgust, just as her attention was called to a number of cards that were being presented to her.

Gardy caught sight of Jack Morrison and recognized him at once. It was the Jack Morrison who had contested his homestead and it was the same Jack Morrison whom he had met at the Senate a few evenings previous. He frowned and his hand went to his hip pocket. Thoughtlessly, he remarked to Laura:

"Thar's that damned Mo'son."

His voice was heard by a number near by; it startled them and caused them to fear that unpleasant events might follow, such as were frequent at that time in the new land.

It was not until his sister admonished him did the Arkansawyer recover.

"Hush, brothah," she said; "don't yo'-all know yo're in church?"

Laura left Gardy signing a number of cards and moved down the aisle of the church toward the rostrum. The blithesome, innocent mountain maid was unaware that she was the cynosure of many admirers. While she had not the brilliant gown of the Only Daughter, she was radiant in natural beauty, wearing a smile winsome, but not coquettish. Slightly athletic from work in the field, her carriage was easy, though not brusque.

Laura soon found herself enjoying the attention of many young men at a time, and while at first she was flustered, the newness of it all appealed to her. But she did not feel elevated to higher realms by her apparent popularity—in fact, she did not realize that she

was the most admired young lady in the church. She talked freely with her newly made acquaintances.

Neither was she aware that other maidens began to gather in knots about the church and comment, some sarcastically, on her appearance, criticizing the cut and color of her gown, the manner in which her hair was done up and the way she carried herself. Many of them curled their lips in scorn. The everlasting feminine!

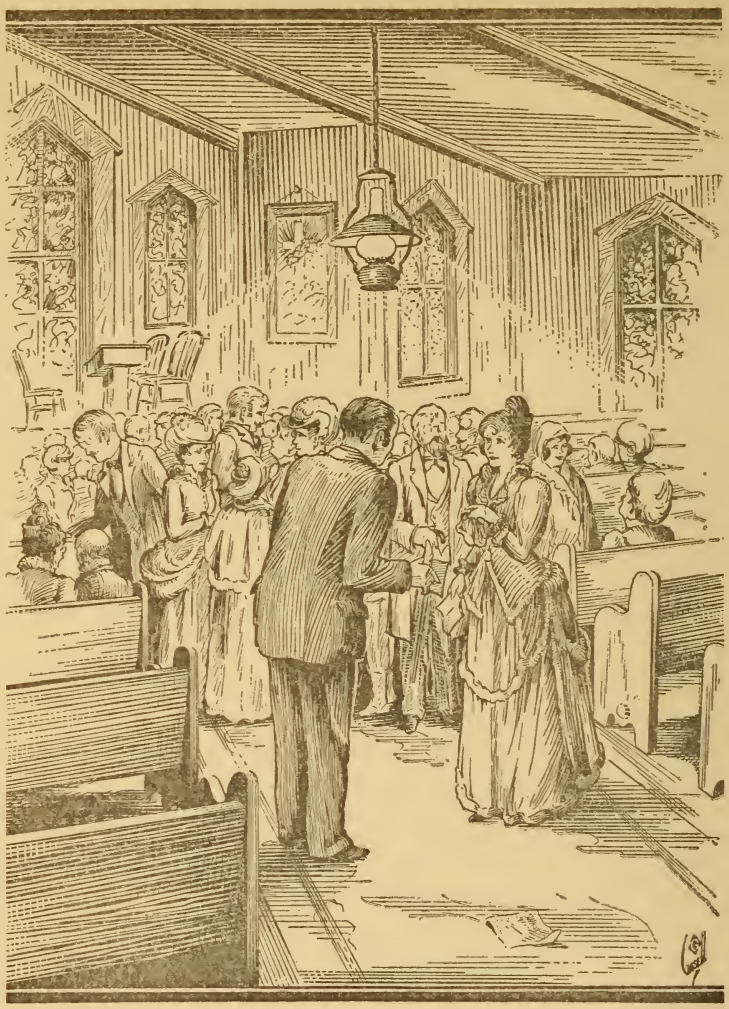
"This must be mountaineers' night," whispered one, disdainfully, to which another added:

"Yes, as the boys say, 'the wagon yard gate must have been left open.' "

Jack had been mixing with the crowd all this time. Passing in and out among the pews, he was making new acquaintances with business-like rapidity. Mothers inconvenienced themselves to have him meet their available daughters, and at times he could be seen surrounded by a group of ladies, entertaining them with amusing anecdotes.

Patti still remained aloof, appearing unconcerned, but in the meantime peevishly nibbling her knuckles.

The banker passed from one group to another until he reached the rostrum, then worked his way in the direction of the window where Laura had left a bevy of young men and was coming toward him. Gradually the two neared each other. He stopped to greet an acquaintance, but hesitated, bent his head forward and rubbed the palm of his hand downward over his face. It was evident that some business deal was uppermost in his mind and at that instant he was thinking deeply.



"The Quotation Lingered in His Dreams . . . Along With the Sweet Innocent Features, Ensconced in Black Wavelets, That Appeared Before Him As He Awoke From His Visions—to Remain Forever."

As he looked down on the narrow carpet that covered the aisle, in his dream of big business, his eyes caught sight of a card—not one of the kind with spots on its face, but a neatly printed pasteboard that someone had dropped on the floor. It had a handsomely engraved border and contained the words in Old English type:

"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The quotation lingered in his dreams and obscured the maze of dollars—it became indellibly impressed upon his brain—along with the sweet, innocent features, ensconsed in black wavelets, that appeared before him as he awoke from his visions—to remain forever.

Dark, entrancing Creole eyes met Nordic gray, then evasively looked downward. But the lighter-hued orbs continued to glisten in veneration—yes, rather dreamily, at the flushed cheeks of the maiden—cheeks that were florid in antithesis to the brunette ringlets giving way before them and revealing delicate nostrils and lips that might denote an artistic temperament instead of ruggedness.

Jack Morrison, a connoisseur of femininity, was under a spell. He devoured her with admiration—the extravagance of effulgent hair bordering features of innocent simplicity—the lips like the petals of a rose that seemed to him to smile (could it be in contempt?) —cheeks, over which a veil of tan ill-concealed the glow of youthful reserve, the neatly-fitting gown, and the dainty foot that peeped beneath the hem of the

skirt and timidly toyed with the figure in the carpet to which she had diverted her eyes from Jack's brusque stare.

The Kansan drew in a long breath and filled his soul to the brim. His previous feelings toward women had been those of conquest—either the tendency of man's baser nature or else to make the woman the pawn in the game that might result in the selfish end he had in view—for Jack lived for self and self alone. Whatever may have been the young banker's motives in the past, he instinctively felt an inclination toward Laura De Forrest that he, or anyone else, never knew existed in his make-up. A heretofore unknown spark within him was being fanned to a soft glow—a new and distant star, more lustrous than all others, had unexpectedly appeared in the pleiades of his dreams. As her soul psychologically met his, he felt himself being lifted to the realms in which the higher ideals reigned, and the immaculate picture of all that is good impressed upon his thoughts was that of one not to be exploited, but to be protected—a tender flower to be nurtured by the sunshine of someone's devotion. And why could not he be the man? The unusual thought startled him; he returned to earth once more.

"Pardon me, Miss, but may I have your card?" he asked, extending his own.

Laura looked up at Morrison—Jack Morrison, of whom her brother had told her as the one who contested their claim; the one whom he told of in reciting his experience in the Senate and the one he hated. For a moment she withdrew; the smile gave way to a defiant curl of her lower lip and her eyes sparkled resentfully. But in the Kansan's eyes she perceived a

glint of kindliness that was assuring—the reflection of the light of the New Star—that something, she knew not what, that made her feel at ease in his presence.

"Yes, suh, yo' may," she acquiesced.

The cards were returned. Jack looked at her signature, then at her, inquisitively.

"Laura De Forrest," he read aloud. "Well, this is indeed a pleasure. Where are you from, Miss De Forrest?"

The feminine chin was elevated to a degree that indicated unmistakable pride, as the reply came distinctly:

"A'kansaw."

"Arkansaw, you say?" asked Jack. For a moment a slight sense of provincial prejudice came over him.

"What part of Arkansaw, may I ask?"

"Mount Zion."

"Mount Zion, you say? Well, well! I've been in Mount Zion—had a very unpleasant experience there—"

Jack studied the girl closely through narrowed eyes again.

"Let's be seated," he suggested, and Laura timorously placed herself beside him in the pew. He leaned against the back of the church seat, then faced her.

"Where have I seen you before, Miss De Forrest?"

"Reckon I don't know, 'less it was at Mount Zion."

The scene at the country store and post office came back to him in an instant.

"You don't mean to tell me that you were the young lady I abruptly spoke to without an introduction in the post office?"

"I reckon I was."

"Then I surely owe you an apology. I wouldn't have taken you to be the same person, you've changed so; but I now see the resemblance."

"I reckon I knowed yo'-all as soon as I seen yo' comin' into th' church this evenin'."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, suh, an' that's not all."

Her laugh made Jack feel uneasy.

"Do yo' recollect when th' big run was made?" she added.

"Yes."

"An yo'-uns done fell from yo're hoss an' was huht?"

"Yes."

"Remembah who found yo'-all and gave yo' a bit to eat an' took keer o' yo'?"

"Do I?" Jack slapped his hands on his knees in ecstacy. "Now I remember. Was it you and your father? Well, well! Who would have thought it? And you're the young lady who bathed my head and face—I was so stupid from my injury at the time that I couldn't have remembered it—just a hazy idea, that's all. As you see, my name is John H. Morrison—I'm from Kansas."

"Yes, suh, I knowed yo'-all was from Kansas—brothah done told me so."

Laura looked down on her petite toe which was tracing an imaginary design on the floor.

"Your brother? And who may he be?"

The proud air of the daughter of Colonel De Forrest was again ascendant and the words came distinctly from her rose-red lips:

"Beauregard De Forrest, suh."

The mention of her brother's name caused Jack to turn white. He synchronized it in his memory with the contest for the homestead. It also recalled the incident in the Senate in which he was a party in the sinister scheme to relieve Gardy of his roll that he might have an opportunity to secure a mortgage on the De Forrest homestead. The long-geared Arkansawyer who fired the shot that emptied the saloon was none other than the brother of the beautiful being he was addressing! He could not look into the dark eyes without a feeling of guilt. He recalled what Barks had told him of the proceedings in the Senate after he had left the saloon, and especially the words of Gardy:

"I reckon Laura is goin' t' have a new dress outen this."

And the young lady with whom he was talking was none other than Laura in her new gown! How becoming it was to her! The thought made the banker restless in her presence.

"I must leave you, Miss De Forrest," he spoke hastily, as he arose from the pew. "I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again some time in the future."

"Thank yo', suh."

Jack proceeded up the aisle to the entrance of the church where he found Patti and her parents close to where he had left them. The Only Daughter was indifferent.

"Well, Miss Patti, how are you enjoying the evening?" he casually asked her.

"Oh, very well," she snapped, as she moved about on the keen edge of nervousness. "Don't you think it is about time we were going home?"

"Why so soon? Hadn't we better wait for refreshments? They're to be served soon."

"Oh, what care I for refreshments; I'm not hungry. Mother and father are now ready to go home, anyway."

"Just as you say, Miss Patti. Where are your wraps?"

The apparel was found in a chair behind Patti. Jack was soon within his overcoat and the Reverend and Mrs. Shanks were attired to leave in short order. A good-night was tendered by the party to the Reverend and Mrs. Folsom, in which Patti participated coldly; then the four departed for the North Jerusalem parsonage.

The boreal autumn wind was still blowing violently, making it necessary for Jack to hold tenaciously to Patti's arm during the short distance they had to go. The Reverend and Mrs. Shanks were far in the lead. Only the roar of the elements gave relief to the silence until Jack spoke:

"Quite cold, this evening, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," came the reply, equally chilling.

The parsonage gate was reached. The pastor and his wife were already enjoying the warmth within.

"I certainly enjoyed the social, Mr. Morrison."

The banker easily perceived that the remark was mechanical and not from the heart.

"The pleasure was all mine, I assure you," he responded.

"Don't work too hard next week, Mr. Morrison. Remember, you are liable to change your politics before election day. Good-night."

Jack was cognizant of her sarcasm.

"Good-night," he replied, and departed for his well-furnished rooms over the Farmers and Merchants Bank.

CHAPTER XVI

UNHAPPY JACK MORRISON

THE banker found his room cold and uninviting, but as he was not in a mood to retire, soon had a warm fire built in the stove which gave the place a cosy air in contrast to the frigid blasts that were sweeping over the plains that night.

Jack leaned back in the cushioned rocker, lit a fresh cigar and rested his feet on the stove hearth. He meditated deeply on the events that had occurred that evening, and then he became reminiscent of every episode in his whole life.

After all, "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world?" and the sweet-faced maiden—the two seemed to loom up inseparable in his mind. He compared his own life, carnal and worldly, with what hers had evidently been in her pristine provincialism, and with all his wealth and prestige he felt his unclean insignificance. She was a sweet tulip of purity while he as a rank, gross weed towered above her. He became disgusted with himself and his past. He had everything in the way of opportunity for achievement —everything that an ambitious man of his age could desire. He was virile and in a country where opportunities had as yet been but touched. Yet he was unhappy.

So she was the one whom he was supposed to have insulted at Mount Zion, and she was the one who was so kind as to attend to him when he was injured during the run. He could now remember the sweet features.

Could he love her? And yet, could he forget her? As he thought of himself and then of her, pure and unsullied as she was, he felt like the leper of old. Yes, he was unclean, unclean!

He became reminiscent of how he had contested the claim of the De Forrests to their homestead. Poor people! he thought. No doubt they had a hard struggle to exist since they came to the territory—and her brother—well, the affair at the Senate would never happen again.

Then there was his infatuation for Patti. Ah, the devil! What did he care for her only to use her in the game of life. Those North Jerusalemites were all under his thumb as long as he ran around with her. But that Arkansas girl, hang it all, he couldn't eliminate her from his mind. He would bet anything that she was a good girl—she showed it. She would make some man a blamed good wife. But not him—he was unclean, unclean. He was not good enough for her.

Thoughts of Laura De Forrest made him sick of the world and all its allurements, yet there were his insatiable worldly ambitions. To play the game he had to be part of the world; to add to his fast accumulating wealth he had to be of the world; to reach the peak of his ambitions for political power he had to be part of the world; to use other human beings as his pawn he had to be of the world. The red of his veins urged him continually to strive for power—the inherent Anglo-Saxon blood that dominates the world.

The paramount impulse within him was to throw himself humbly at her innocent feet, implore her to become part of his life and share his wealth and prestige. But to do that he would have to ask her to

become part of his world with all its sham. No, he could not do that. He adored her as she was, in her immaculate simplicity. To be part of his life might tend to make her of his kind, and he did not desire to so submerge her.

Then again, he thought of how he might forsake his ambitions, all of which he had set his heart on, forget the world and all its allurements, become clean and regenerated, and become part of her little sphere, worship her God after her manner and live the simple, whole-souled life of her kind.

But there was the rub, he thought, as the cigar ashes were flipped by his fingers and dropped onto the zinc. Another mushroom of blue was blown ceilingward and he watched it disseminate itself in the air. He stared dreamily into space like one in a trance. He remained motionless for an instant like an inanimate thing chiseled in stone; then a smile gradually crept over his firm-set mouth.

The great game of life is like a clever vampire to one of the resourcefulness and virility of Jack Morrison—it is seducing, bewitching. He was still young and there were many years ahead of him before he would decide to settle down. While he adored Laura De Forrest he would refrain from making her a part of his unclean self; he would leave her the wholesome flower as she was while he—he would continue his career as he had already planned—he would remain a part of the world that he might use it to his own selfish advantage. He glorified in his mental and physical strength, yet he remained unclean, unclean.

Jack arose from his chair, tossed the stub of his cigar into the fire and removed his coat, vest and col-

lar. Returning to the chair, he unlaced his shoes; then sat for a moment staring at the burning coal briquets. Presently he stretched his arms, laughed, and spoke to the fire:

"Hell, what do I want to fall in love for? I'm yet young."

The shoes and stockings were removed; the damper was shut off on the stove and Jack Morrison was soon disrobed and in bed. He lay there as the moon's rays shone down through the window onto his handsome, blond features. The eyelids became heavy and closed. His somniloquent mutterings were but little above a whisper:

"Yes, what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world."

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST COUNTY ELECTION

AROUND a long table in the Republican headquarters sat Jack Morrison, Barks and a bevy of local party leaders. It was the night of the first election in the new county, and at the polling places of the two Ossineke precincts election officials were laboring over blanket-sheet ballots, tallying off the votes for each candidate as they were being counted. The returns from two of the sparsely settled townships had arrived, indicating but little splitting and a close vote, with the Republican ticket but slightly in the majority.

"How are they coming Jack?" asked a new arrival.

The county boss removed a cigar from beneath his teeth.

"Slow, damn it, but we're in the lead. Are they nearly through down at the polls?'

"Yes; they've almost finished, but when I left the Democrats were in the lead."

"Th' devil you say! That can't be possible."

The banker looked inquisitively at Barks. Several henchmen arose from their chairs, startled.

"Oh, what you giving us?' interposed Barks. "There must be something wrong, as we've a good working majority in the town."

"You certainly must be mistaken," insisted Jack.

"Well, jus' wait and see," assured the bearer of the message.

The assemblage laughed. It was ridiculous to think that a community in which Jack Morrison had so much influence would dare go anyway but that which

he favored. The henchmen reseated themselves; the crowd of partisans was augmented by a number of new arrivals and the election cigar smoke became denser.

Jack's eyes sparkled with confidence.

"We're sure going to clean them up," he asserted.

A more timid of the faithful spoke up:

"But, Johnny, old boy; supposing the Ossineke precincts go against us? Then we're licked."

"Licked the devil! There's the two nigger townships to be heard from—they'll offset any losses in Ossineke."

"But, as I understand it, the niggers are sore because they didn't get a man on the ticket."

"Yes, they *were* sore; but I've already fixed the matter up—they'll come around all right."

The man, however, was skeptic.

"I dunno," he said, as he removed his sombrero and scratched his head—"can't depend on the black cusses."

Just then there was a commotion at the doorway. Several of the candidates for county offices were entering, bearing sample ballots containing the returns from the two local precincts. There was anything but an air of triumph in the way they walked in and slammed the yellow sheets onto the table before the boss.

Jack grabbed the sheets eagerly and everyone present crowded near the table.

"How did she go, Johnny?" yelled several.

Jack ran his fingers down the columns on each sheet. He removed his hat, scratched his blond hair and studied the results again.

"How goes it, Jack?" insisted the crowd.

The boss shook his head and half-heartedly answered:

"Guess they've beaten us, boys, as far as Ossineke is concerned."

Imprecations filled the air instead of cheering. Jack turned to Edgar Barks.

"I thought you had made a careful poll of the town," he spoke.

"I did, and it showed a Republican majority of at least fifty."

The boss relit his cigar and smiled.

"We'll lick them yet," he said.

There were a few in the crowd who smiled knowingly when the Ossineke returns were announced. The city had a Republican majority, they felt confident, but themselves and a number of others of that faith voted a straight Democratic ticket as a remonstrance against the banker's boss rule.

The returns at that time showed a substantial Democratic lead, though there were yet several precincts of the county to be heard from.

At the Democratic headquarters an entirely different scene was being staged. The returns from the local precincts set the assemblage to cheering and here and there could be heard the rebel yell.

Chairman Williams made a speech, bubbling over with partisan fervor, and in which he expressed confidence that the new county was Democratic beyond a doubt.

"How about the niggah townships?" asked a voice.

"Th' niggah townships, suh, are all right," assured the chairman. "They've at last done got their eyes

open an' have discovered that th' so-called Grand Ol' Pa'ty has been pullin' th' wool over 'em."

Another cheer rent the air; then all settled down to a babble of conversation while further returns were being received over the telephone. The result made no material change in the situation and the crowd gave itself over to yelling and tossing of hats to the ceiling.

Then a tall Texan mounted a chair, and holding his slouch hat crumpled in his hand, called for order.

"Boys," he said after quiet had been restored, "I done feel it in my bones that we'-all are goin' t' lick 'em, an' am willin' to stake every cent I have on it. Who's with me?"

He clinked all his loose change into his hat and started to pass his top piece among the crowd. Southwesterners, in those days, were worshippers of that elusive god, Chance. They had staked all on coming to the territory and life had been continually a game with them in which the elements played the opposing hand, whether it be drouth, boll-weevil, chinch-bug or blizzard. So enthusiastic were those present at the Democratic headquarters that they climbed over one another to add to the wager. After all had contributed, the total of coin, currency and checks reached approximately one thousand dollars—a goodly sum in those days.

"Now, boys," spoke the Texan, "I'll tell yo'-all what we'-uns will do: We'll send one of us ovah to Jack Mo'son and tell him what we've raised and ask him if he can beat it."

Another yell ripped the smoke-saturated atmosphere and the messenger departed.

Arriving at the Republican camp, the emissary ne-

gotiated his way through the dense crowd to where Jack was sitting. Approaching the chief, he delivered the challenge.

The banker laughed, sarcastically; then arising from his chair, called for order.

"Boys," he spoke, "the people over at the other place offer to bet a thousand they will carry the county. I suggest that we cover that amount, three to one. Can we do it?"

"You damned right we can," came a grand chorus.

A collection was taken and showed an amount equal to that raised at the other place. Jack laid down his cigar, withdrew a check book from his pocket and added two thousand more.

The crowd cheered: "Hurrah for Morrison!" and the Democratic envoy returned to his own people.

At the headquarters of the opposition it was announced that their bet had been trebled. It was useless to attempt to meet it; there were no bankers in their ranks.

"Some th' fellahs done goin' t' get that thar Mo'son —see if they don't."

The words startled Laura De Forrest as she was preparing the evening meal. The sentence came from outside where Gardy had but returned from taking care of the mules and was in conversation with his father. The words of her brother were all that she heard, but they were sufficient to set her nerves on edge.

At the supper table she was morose, as if she had received a premonition that something horrible was going to happen. She knew it was election night, and

whatever the result might be, there would be drunkenness, fighting and possibly killing.

At the table the colonel and his son talked of nothing but the election.

"I've done been told that th' niggahs will vote with us," remarked the junior De Forrest.

"Don't believe it, boy," insisted the old man, "them black devils done know nothin' but vote th' Republican ticket."

"Well, anyhow, if Jack Mo'son an' his Jayhawkers win, th' boys say thar'll shore be some shootin'."

Laura listened keenly, and leaning forward, locked her fingers in an effort to catch every word Gardy uttered. The remark but added to her fear.

"Reckon that won't do any good, boy," grumbled the colonel. "Remembah, this isn't A'kansaw, but jus' a ca'petbag territory."

The conversation continued along political lines, and when the son had concluded his meal, he arose, plucked his hat from off a peg and started for the door.

His sister rushed forward and clinched his coat sleeve.

"Where yo'-all goin', brothah?"

"Reckon I'm goin' t' see how th' 'lection done went."

"But, brothah," pleaded the girl, "yo'-all bettah stay home tonight." She stared at him beseechingly. "Yo' done know thar'll be fights an' maybe killin's an' yo' might get hurt."

"Thar, thar, sistah," drawled the brother, consolingly, as he affectionately drew her to him. "Reckon yo'll need not worry as I done know how t' take keer myself."

"Yeah, but I reckon I done feel somethin' awful is goin' to happen. Bettah stay home, brothah."

"Ah, you'-alls's jus' narvous—done got th' chills, have yo'? Or what ails yo'?"

"Nuthin'."

The boy withdrew himself from the girl's embrace. She reluctantly released him.

"Good night, sis," he bade her, as he disappeared out the door. "Don't yo'-all worry; I reckon I'll be home directly."

"Good night, brothah. Take keer yo'self."

At the Republican assembly the returns came in from the outlying townships slowly. Each telephone message told of a close contest, with but little splitting, and it was near midnight when all but two townships had been heard from, leaving the result practically as it was at first, with the Democratic ticket in the lead.

Boss Morrison puffed violently at his cigar and scratched his head.

"I wonder what in hell makes those niggers so damned slow," he ejaculated, impatiently. "Call 'em up again, Barks."

Edgar Barks obeyed, and hardly were the connections made when he called for a pad of paper. Before he left the phone he had the complete returns from both the black townships.

The crowd pressed him closely in its eagerness to hear the result. The black precincts had remained loyal and the Republican ticket was safe!

The scene resembled a riot when the result was read. The successful candidates were picked off their

feet and carried on willing shoulders out into the street, amid cheers.

"Hurrah for Jack Morrison!"

"Hurrah for the *Eagle!*"

"Get out the band!"

The gathering emerged from the building with whoops not unlike the Apaches on war trail.

They were tense moments that Laura De Forrest attempted to while away after the departure from the cottage of her brother Gardy. Hour after hour had been tolled by the clock as she time and again went to the door where she stood wringing her hands and peering in the direction of the well-lighted town in hopes that each moment her brother's approaching footsteps could be heard. She was fully familiar with his prejudicial traits, and realized what would happen should his impulsive, half-Creole blood become aroused. He had promised to return home early, and now it was near midnight and his lank silhouette was not visible. The apprehension grew on her; the premonition received new force. The road leading to town was dark and lonely. Should she venture forth into the blackness alone?

Presently she heard the cheers of men wafted on the cool night-breeze from the direction of the city. One faction had won—she knew not which; neither did she care.

She tip-toed to the corner of the room where her father was asleep in bed. She looked keenly into his aged face to convince herself that he was slumbering; then throwing a shawl over her shoulders, darted out

the door and a few steps found her out in the middle of the road.

Louder and louder resounded the cheers, like echoes of the distant past when the original inhabitants of the territory made medicine and war. Some invisible force impelled her to run faster and faster. All at once the heavens were ablaze with a red light, causing her to stop suddenly and wonder if something supernatural was about to happen. The autumnal breeze drew the rose-red blood to her face and caused it to burn. The bright lights of the town ahead staggered her, but with considerable effort she was able to keep within the bounds of the road and not fall into the ditches alongside. Not until the outskirts of Ossineke was reached did she relax her pace.

There was something irresistible, however, that drew her on—on to Main street where she found the sidewalks crowded with men—men drunk, men cheering and men swearing.

"Oh, if I could only find Gardy," she sobbed. "I'm afeared he'll do somethin' wrong."

She studied inquisitively the visage of every man in hopes of finding her brother, but he was only one of the excited hundreds that thronged the sidewalks.

"How did the election go?" she heard one man ask.

"Oh, Jack Morrison bluffed the niggers and she's gone Republican," replied another.

The words spurred Laura to greater efforts to find Beauregard. As she was worming her way through the crowd her ears caught the sound of distant thunder. Instantly the "boom, boom, boom-boom-boom" of a bass drum was heard coming down the street. She followed the rabble as it gravitated toward the curb.

Rockets continued to pierce the blackness above and men cheered deep-throatedly.

The band was but a block away. The drums stopped for a step or two; then the snare drum snarled like a defiant dog. "Boom-boom," thundered the big sheepskin in stacatto and the brassing notes of "Marching Through Georgia" drowned the cheering. It was the air of that hated song of Yankee triumph! Laura, already keyed to high pitch, felt the sting intensely. She gripped with clutching fingers at something invisible and her dark eyes shone as one affronted, for she was a proud daughter of the Southland.

On the sidewalk edge she heard men muttering menacing oaths.

"They will rub it into us, will they?' one was heard to say as he prefaced his words with the jargon of the nether regions.

Again, the thought of her brother made Laura forget the band's triumphant music and she resumed her search for him, but was soon lost in the masculine forest.

The band was now near by, and as she curiously elbowed her way to the edge of the sidewalk to get a glimpse of the musicians, the crack of a six-gun rang out above the vibration of brass and the band stopped playing instanter. A bullet had pierced the bell of the helicon tuba in the front rank and the musicians scattered like stampeded cattle.

The shooting was the signal for several fights to begin and at intervals other shots were added to the din. The police were powerless.

Laura was hurtled along by the human current

down to an interesecting street over which flickered an arc light.

"Hurrah for Jack Morrison!" echoed out over the heads of the men who congested the crossing. Under the light in the street Laura saw the rabble give way to an approaching vehicle. As it halted, she caught sight of Jack seated thereon and smiling and bowing to the plaudits of his partisans. On the sidewalk near her were the Texans and Arkansawyers. There was no demonstration among the Southerners, but on the other hand murmurings that indicated impending trouble.

Laura inquired of several in regard to Gardy, until at last her brother was pointed out to her in a bunch of men standing near the crosswalk.

It was with considerable difficulty that she negotiated her way through the dense formation. But at last she reached a point where she recognized her brother but a few feet from her.

"Gardy! Gardy! she screamed, but her voice was like that of one attempting to penetrate a chorus of thunders.

Beauregard was shaking his fist definantly at Jack Morrison and the crowd of cohorts that surrounded him like the courtiers of a king. The circle about Gardy was equally as sullen as the young Arkansawyer. She could see his bright eyes shine with fiery hatred.

"Oh, my, if I could only get to him," she sobbed.

What she saw next caused her heart to palpitate violently and every part of her body to be convulsed. The red glow of excitement and exertion disappeared from her features and gave way to the whiteness of death-like apprehension—her brother reached for his

hip pocket. She looked at Jack and his visage was aglow with the intoxication of victory—a visage garlanded with smiles—clean-chisled, handsome features, the flush of triumph contradicting his yellow-white hair. The ecstatic facial expression indicated no sense of impending danger, but on the other hand, the soul of a virile youth in the joyous realization of his first great conquest shone forth.

The scene was too much for Laura. She closed her eyes and leaped toward her brother. Her hair, which had become slightly dishevelled, entangled itself in a man's coat button and she was thrown back.

"Beg your pardon, lady," was all the man had time to say.

Once more she threw her weight forward into the mass, in the meantime calling out her brother's name. This time she made some headway, but as she raised her eyes, the scene she beheld made her scream. Gardy had in his hand a shining piece of cold steel which he was slowly raising to a level with Jack's heart.

"Gardy! Gardy!' she shrieked, and with apparent superhuman effort threw the men in front of her to one side. She landed, both arms about Gardy's neck, just as he was about to pull the trigger.

The brother was taken by surprise and the gun dropped to the walk. He turned about to find his sister's watering eyes looking beseechingly up at him. The nearby witnesses stood aside and looked on with awe.

"My heavens, Gardy! What were yo'-all goin' t' do? Don't yo' remembah th' commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill' "?

The young man's features softened; the expression metamorphosed from anger to compassion.

"Thar, thar, sis. Of cou'se it was wrong, but I reckon I was fightin' mad," were his comforting words.

But a few noticed the incident, and it was but a minute afterward that Jack, standing up in the carriage and bowing to the huzzas of the multitude, caught a glimpse of Laura. He noticed her sobbing, and he ceased salaaming and smiling for a moment, and gazed at her stolidly; then his youthful features took on the lines of deep sympathy. She saw him raise his hat in recognition and his face beamed again —not the usual mechanical beam of a politician, but the genuine display of adoration. She timidly nodded in return. But he had yet to know that the mountain maid had been his saviour.

Up the street the enthusiastic crowd surged, carrying Jack and the carriage with it, while Gardy took his sister by the arm and led her down a side street to avoid the throng; thence homeward they trudged.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAINE IS DESTROYED

IT WAS on a February night following the first political campaign in the new county that the state of Kansas let loose one of its worst blizzards down upon the adolescent territory; the temperature dropped several degrees and by morning a foot of snow was on the level. Still the cutting wind blew a gale, frigid and penetrating; the snow was blinding and it was only by feeling along fences and buildings that the inhabitants of Ossineke were able to move about. Trains were delayed; many of the settlers suffered from unpreparedness and stock on the plains died by thousands. It was only an occasional cowman who had spent several years on the range before the advent of the white settler who could recall anything like the blizzard of that night, and that was in the days when the buffalo hunted the tree-fringed canyons and hunched their backs against the wind.

After two days of intense suffering by the inhabitants, the weather performed another freakish prank; the mercury in the thermometer rose as fast as it had fallen; the sun came out as on a day in June and the snow melted like under the breath of a Northwestern chinook. Then the slush and mud were ankle deep for several days.

It was with difficulty that the De Forrest family lived in comfort during the storm, as their home was a loosely constructed affair, and the constant feeding of corncobs into the stove was necessary to keep the fire ablaze and repel the encroachments of the elements as the snow and icy air sifted in through numerous cracks.

Time and again, during the storm, did Gardy utter imprecations against the Jayhawker state for blowing her Arctic breath southward.

"Wish that damned Kansas would keep its blizzard at home," he was heard to say at intervals as he fed the insatiable maw of the stove with fresh corncobs.

Colonel De Forrest became irritable and spoke time and again of the sunny days they had spent in Arkansas and longed for the time when they would return to their native habitat.

As soon as the storm had spent its fury, Gardy ventured forth to town, wading with difficulty through the deep snow and slush and swearing at every step.

"We nevah had anything like this in A'kansaw," he grumbled, "an' I reckon they nevah had anything like it heah till those Jayhawkers done came."

He arrived at the post office coincident with the belated mail. The building was crowded with old and young, anxiously awaiting the distribution of the daily papers. There was an atmosphere of excitement about the place that Beauregard could not at first comprehend. So much commotion had not been seen in the little city since the night of the county election. He but took his place in the line-up against the wall when he was accosted by one of his acquaintances:

"Did you hear about it, Gardy?"

"Reckon I didn't."

"Why, the report went over the wire last night that the Maine was blown up."

Gardy opened wide his mouth and stared inquisitively.

"What Maine?" he asked.

"Why, the battleship Maine, you rube—where have you been for the last few days?"

"Reckon I've been at home tryin' t' keep wa'm."

"Yep, the Maine has been blown up—supposed to have been done by Spaniards."

"By Spaniards?" Beauregard frowned. "Well, I reckon that means wah."

"Wait till we see the papers."

A copy of the Wichita *Daily Beacon* was withdrawn from a box and the crowd in the post office immediately centered about the reader, shoving one another aside and craning necks over shoulders in front of them to get a glimpse of the headline:

"THE MAINE IS DESTROYED"

The black letters were flashed across the front page.

"Reported Over Three Hundred Americans Killed—"

The crowd stood for a moment silent and aghast; the features of even some of the stouter hearted blanched. Others of the men doubled up their fists and grated their teeth—men from Kansas and men from Arkansaw—all Americans—brawny men they were, hardened by life in the new land. Then, in the crowd were a few whose hair was tinged with silver, who said nothing, but their thoughts went back to the sixties when the seemingly never-ending streams of blue moved southward and the seemingly never-ending streams of gray moved northward. And there was one man who carried a cane, whose one sleeve was empty and whose beard was grizzled. The man wore a bronze button on the lapel of his coat. Through cour-

tesy due to one of his years, the paper was passed over the heads of the crowd that he might scan the headlines. He read with deep interest, then removed his glasses, drew a deep breath and remarked:

"Boys, that reminds me of when Fort Sumpter was fired on."

"This shore means wah," interposed another, with a Dixie accent.

"If this means wah," added Gardy, "then I mus' go home an' tell dad about it. If thar's goin' t' be any wah goin' on, he'll like t' heah about it."

He did not tarry for the general delivery to be opened, but was out of the post office and on the road toward home at a gait a trifle faster than usual.

Bursting through the door of the cottage, he startled his father and sister by his brusque entry.

"What's the mattah, boy?' exclaimed the parent. "Done got th' mail?"

"Nope, dad, but did yo'-all heah thar's goin' to be wah?"

The old man dropped his cane and leaned forward in his chair.

"Wah, yo' say? What yo'-all mean, boy?"

"Th' papahs say the Spaniards blowed up th' Maine an' killed a hull lot o' th' sailors."

The old veteran's face turned ashen and Laura held her breath. Then his features took on a color as if from renewed youth—the old fire was reignited within him. Reaching for his walking stick, he arose from his chair and hobbled about excitedly.

"An' they done killed our brave American sailors, did they? Oh, if I was only young once mo'—we'd show 'em what a reunited kentry could do. Boy, go

down town an' get a papah. It's wah, now, shore; it's wah."

The veteran limped back and forth nervously while his son disappeared out the door and over the rapidly melting snow to the post office.

As Gardy entered the building he found it filled with an excited crowd as before. In one corner stood Jack Morrison and Edgar Barks studying the front page of one of the southwestern dailies.

"Well, I guess that means a scrap," spoke the banker.

"It certainly looks like war," replied Barks, and then the words, tinted with sarcasm:

"We'll now have a chance to see how loyal to the country these Southerners will be."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BLENDING OF THE FLAGS

HE tocsin of freemen was sounded. It went out from the throats of seventy millions of people who had reserved judgment while the court of inquiry was in session; then it came from the North, South, East and West—it was the blood call of a race. The administration was swept away by the popular clamor for retribution and aid for Cuba. The Southern states were among the first to offer their militia to the government and the others followed rapidly.

As usual, the nation was unprepared. It was necessary to call for volunteers, and while hundreds of thousands responded to the national summons, the entire country looked to the new Southwest for the men for immediate service—men tempered to life on the plains, the expert horsemen, the crack shots—men without fear, the ready-made soldiers of the time. Little wonder that a prominent personage at Washington took it upon himself to recruit a regiment of these sturdy Americans.

Ossineke and surrounding country was seething with patriotism, and warm April days brought forth flag raisings, bonfires, mass meetings and the like.

A big patriotic rally was advertised for one Saturday and an invitation was extended the people of the entire county to be present. It was on that day recruiting was to commence for a company of troopers to form a part of the regiment being organized from the Southwest.

The eventful morn found Ossineke in holiday attire.

Red, white and blue bunting stretched from building to building and was interlaced in arches over the streets. The crowd gathered early and soon the streets were jammed with people. Near the noon hour the city band appeared, and the strains of the "Star Spangled Banner" set the crowd frantic.

"Give us Dixie! Play Dixie!" came from hundreds of throats. The soul of the South was stirred by the air. Men tossed their hats among the bunting and screamed and Confederate veterans wept emotional tears.

Jack Morrison and his campanion stood on a corner watching the display of enthusiasm.

"Looks like the Mason and Dixon line is all shot to hell, doesn't it, John?" remarked the gambler, facetiously. "What are you going to do for thunder next campaign?"

Barks awaited a reply, but there was none coming. The banker was leisurely smoking a cigar and staring with possessive eyes at someone directly in front of him. It was Laura De Forrest he saw, gowned in a chic dress of red, white and blue, the prevailing colors of the day.

Barks stared at the banker in amazement.

"Well, what in the devil has gotten into you of late?" he asked further.

Still there was no answer.

Colonel Johnson De Forrest, attired in a much-worn uniform of gray, stayed well with his son and daughter as the three were shoved about by the crowd. Gardy, emblazoned by a tri-colored necktie, resembled an animated barber sign.

Once, as they were wedged within a surging mass, the old veteran's cane was knocked from under him and he fell against the curb. Gardy was about to assist him to rise lest the legion of feet trample him under, but an elderly man in blue clothes and wearing on the lapel of his coat the bronze button of the Grand Army of the Republic, reached down and lifted the colonel to his feet.

They stood vis-a-vis for a moment; then the hand of the man in blue was extended, both raised their hats and hands were clasped. The eyes of each lit up with affection.

"Hello, Johnny."

"Hello, Yank."

"What regiment?"

"Ninety-fust A'kansaw, suh. An' you'-uns?"

"One-hundredth Ohio. Guess we made it pretty hot for you down at Vicksburg, didn't we?"

"Reckon yo'-all did, suh; but didn't we make it wa'm fo' yo' at Chickasaw Bayou?"

The Union veteran laughed boyishly.

"You sure enough did," he retorted. "I can hear that rebel yell till this day—let's go over to yonder bench and have a visit."

The two walked away, arm in arm, leaving Gardy and his sister by themselves drinking in the thrilling scenes that were following.

The crowd became denser about the pavilion that had been erected in the center of the street, and as the people concentrated nearer it seemed that the structure would be swept from its foundation.

In front of the temporary platform draped two large flags, one of them the Stars and Stripes and

the other the Bars and Stars of the Lost Cause, and between the two larger banners was suspended the lone star emblem of *Cuba Libre*. On the sides a riot of flags and bunting prevailed.

The band was first to occupy the platform and blared a program of patriotic airs. Then came the speakers, among them men from the ranks of veterans of both blue and gray.

Colonel Clarence Williams, erstwhile Democratic county chairman, acted as presiding officer of the occasion, and after a few brief remarks introduced the Union veteran who had been companionable to Colonel De Forrest. Unlike Colonel De Forrest, the Northern warrior was erect and solderly—Father Time had been lenient with him. In order to better catch his words, the crowd swept Gardy and Laura against the platform.

"Oh, look, Gardy; if there ain't an old Yankee sojer goin' to speak," exclaimed the girl as she clapped her hands.

"I reckon he's going t' tell how he licked th' South," responded Gardy, lugubriously; "these Yankees are allus wavin' th' bloody shirt."

The speaker, contrary to Gardy's expectations, paid equal tribute to the men who fought on both sides during the war of the rebellion.

"It is not for me to recite the merits of the controversy, it ended at Appomattox," he spoke. "Since then there has been but one nation and but one flag. There have been, nevertheless, among us in this new county since the opening, unfortunately, men who for political purposes resurrected the ghost of the past—"

Gardy hunched his sister.

"Wondah how th' Jayhawker likes that?" he whispered—

"But I am here to tell you, fellow citizens," continued the speaker, "such men are not representative Americans, though they occasionally wrap the Stars and Stripes about them for sinister purposes—"

The speaker was compelled to hesitate while flags were waved, hats were tossed into the air and the sea of human faces became agitated with frantic enthusiasm.

"They are moral cowards," he went on, "who would make the grand old banner the emblem of cheap politics—that glorious flag, which is once more unfurled in the cause of humanity and freedom, and under whose folds the sons of the men who wore the blue and the sons of the men who wore the gray are ready for battle, and if need be, die for their reunited country. The Stars and Stripes is the emblem of the Democrat, Republican and Populist alike; it is the banner of the North and the South, and all those who would trail it in the mire of mercenary politics are not Americans, but are cowards who would not be the first to enlist under its Stars—"

"Where's Morrison?" shouted a voice from the crowd, interrupting the speaker—

"But this is not the time to deal at length with the iniquities of politics; we have come together here today to renew our allegiance to the greatest and best government on earth. This afternoon a recruiting officer will hold forth at the court house, and, my fellow citizens, were it not for my years I would gladly subscribe my name once more to the company roster. But let not this county be found wanting; there are many

of our young men who, I know, are more than anxious to enlist; God bless them.

"The next speaker is one who has fought on the other side, fellow citizens, and after the band plays 'Dixie' we'll hear what he has to say. I thank you."

The strains of the Southern air brought forth more vociferous cheering, in the midst of which a knot of ex-Confederates gave the rebel yell. When the last note had died away, a tall, soldierly man with gray goatee and mustache, stepped forward. Contrary to what had been anticipated, instead of a frock of butternut, he was attired in a conventional Prince Albert.

"Fellow Americans," he commenced, "I have been asked why I did not put on my gray unifo'm. It's not because I'm ashamed of it—nay, on the contrary, I'm proud of it, but today we all gathah togethah as Yankees, an' our sons will go forth t' battle soon in but th' one cullah—blue."

Turning to the survivors of the Confederacy, he continued:

"Comrades, many yeahs have passed since we took up a'ms agin th' old bannah, haven't they? But it was a sad day fo' us that we'-all trailed it in th' dust. Comrades, the lives of our brave sailors have been snuffed out by a foreign assassin. How many of yo' would be willin' to die to avenge their death? How many, rise to yo' feet."

The response was unanimous. Men cheered and women wept as the Old Guard of Southern Americans stood at attention. Facing the crowd again, the speaker said:

"Using the wo'ds of that great American, Abraham Lincoln, 'with malice towa'd none an' charity fo' all,' I

am heah to say in behalf of th' South, th' Sta's an' Stripes is *our* flag; the South serves no othah—"

There was intense emotion in his manner as he hesitated to remove a lump in his throat and a tear or two dropped onto the lapel of his coat.

"An' may that flag wave until judgment day ovah this nation chosen by God t' be th' champion of th' oppressed th' world ovah."

He reached for the lower end of the Confederate emblem.

"My devotion to this bannah," he spoke, "is but t' th' memory of the brave men and women o' th' Lost Cause, but to this one—" with the other hand he clasped the Stars and Stripes—"it is undying."

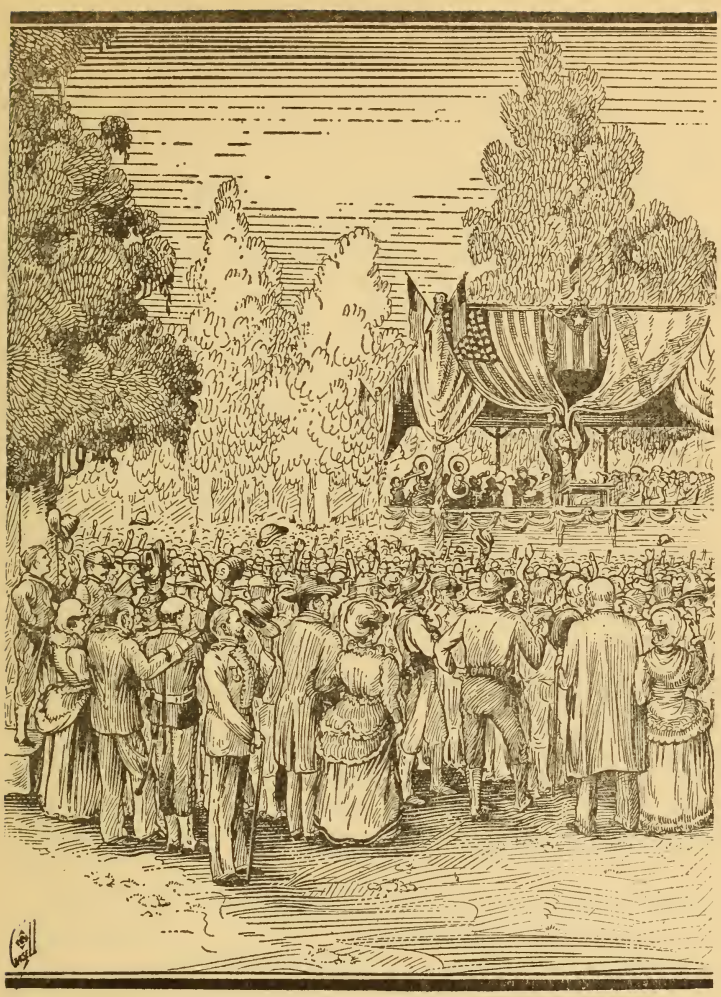
Dramatically he stood before the two banners, entwining their folds so that the Stripes and Bars blended.

What a contrast was the scene to that of a few months previous when the political campaign had divided the people of the community; when the phantom of the past had been resurrected and paraded about as partisan capital!

As the old battle-scarred warrior stood enframed in the entwined banners, the demonstration of the assembled people bordered on insanity. Men who had been bitter enemies went about as warm friends.

Only Jack Morrison and Edgar Barks together with a few of their coterie refrained from entering into the celebration. They remained stationary on the sidewalk, the banker nervously chewing on a cigar and forcing a smile.

"They can't forget that old rag of theirs, can they



"Dramatically He Stood Before the Two Banners, Entwining the Folds So That the Stripes and Bars Blended."

Jack?" confidentially remarked Barks. "See how the old rebel is mixing it up with *our* flag."

"Oh, well," came the reply; "just wait and see how many of them will enlist—that'll tell the tale—just watch."

Other speakers followed on the program, a parade was in order and the remainder of the day was given over to visiting, the people from outside remaining in town until late in the evening.

CHAPTER XX

THE INDOMITABLE BLOOD STRAIN

BEAUREGARD DE FORREST inhaled deeply of the patriotic atmosphere on the afternoon of the celebration until something impulsive asserted itself within him. There was something about the national call to arms that appealed strongly to his virility—that something we call Duty kept whispering to him:

"Are you going to do it?"

But there were father and sister of whom he was the main support—the three had always been inseparable; he could not even think of leaving them. And as he and Laura strolled about town that afternoon, Duty, the Invisible Thing, haunted him. It followed him wherever he went.

"It's for you to do, lad; you are young and strong. Are you going to do it?"

He could not escape it.

"Are you a man?" it insisted.

He felt a magnetism in the recruiting office—the atavism of his race asserting itself, for in his veins flowed the blood of the men of Hastings, Bunker Hill and the Alamo, the same blood that twenty years later carried to victory the men of Chateau Thierry and the Argonne.

No, it was impossible for him to leave home and go to the front; he could not think of it! In vain he endeavored to disabuse his mind of the thought of enlisting. Duty whispered again:

"We need you; are you going to do it?"

The two forces battled within his virile soul for a

decision—a decision between the dual duty to home and country. The way the contending elements attempted to tear him asunder was excruciating. The sweat ran in cold beads down his cheek. Finally Duty whispered again:

"Are you a man?"

"I *am* a man," he exclaimed aloud as he doubled up his fist, contracted every muscle in his rugged frame and set his teeth firmly together.

"Why, brothah, what's th' mattah with yo'-all? What do yo' mean?" bewilderedly inquired his sister, who had been marvelling for several minutes at Gardy's meditative mood.

He stopped in his tracks, and imprisoning both his sister's hands in his own, looked affectionately into her eyes.

"Laura, I'm done goin' to enlist," he spoke, tremorously, reluctantly and with some effort.

The red glow of springtime left Laura's face.

"Brothah, oh! brothah," she gasped. "What'll we-all do without yo'? An' then, yo'-all might get killed."

The young Southerner turned to one side and bent his head forward.

"I know it; I know it, sis, but I done feel's though I mus' enlist. I simply can't get it outen my mind."

"But, brothah, yo'-all won't need t' go; thar'll be heaps of men enlistin' an' they won't need yo'."

"Yeah, sis, heaps of th' boys have already enlisted, but none of them by th' name of De Forrest."

The mention of the family name caused a touch of pride to become assertive in the girl which momentarily overcame her apprehension.

"But, Gardy, yo'd bettah see daddy fust.'

"I've done made up my mind t' go, sis; but we-all will go an' see dad, anyhow."

"I know, brothah, it'll break his deah old heart."

The two started out slowly and morosely to find the parent. After a brief search they discovered him visiting with some members of the G. A. R. Laura was first to speak. Interrupting her father's conversation and tugging at his coat sleeve, she said:

"Daddy!"—

She hesitated lest the news would be unbearable to the veteran.

"Yo'-all know Gardy is done goin' t' enlist an' I—an' I done pleaded with him not to? Oh, this is awful, daddy."

Moisture appeared in her eyes as she leaned heavily on her father.

The old man studied his son from head to boots as if in admiration of his splendid physique. He then drew in a long breath, and grasping the youth's big hand tenaciously, he spoke while his war-worn frame shook with emotion and the words came with supreme effort:

"My boy—we-all will miss yo' while yo're gone—we need yo'-all at home—but—but—yo're all we ken give fo' this cause."

He placed his withered hands on the youth's broad shoulders and leaned heavily.

"My boy," he continued, "go! Yes, go an' fight fo' th' old flag—it is our flag—an' be brave, my boy, an' bear up well yo're family name. Oh, if I was only young once mo'! But come on, boy; let's done go t' th' recruitin' office. Come on, gal."

The three trudged away while an elderly Union

veteran, who was a witness to the scene, bared his head. In the transport of reminiscence similar sights were visible to him several decades back.

Arriving at the court house, the De Forrests found a fringe surrounding the building that was almost impenetrable. The circle consisted of men of all types, mostly young and middle-aged, with an occasional swarthy old-timer of the plains. There were big, lean cowmen with broad-rimmed hats turned up in front on which were pinned tiny Cuban flags; youths from the ranches, boiling over with enthusiasm, and here and there a clerical man from town, aenemic and effeminite, who had hopes of passing the exacting physical test that the examining surgeon insisted on. All were in a happy mood as though anticipating a holiday trip. Many were impelled to enlist from pure patriotic motives; others out of love for adventure and the pliocene desire to fight.

Presently out of the entrance of the court house emerged a bronzed man of the prairies, his heavy black mustache hanging low and his spurs clawing out slivers in the steps of the building. The crowd gave way in bewilderment as he strode around to the side of the building, his arms folded and his head erect like an Indian chieftan in the pride of his race. Seating himself on a box, he bent his head between his knees and clutched his long black hair with his fingers. Groans sounded from his deep, bass throat and copious tears—real manly tears—fell to the ground. It was Wall-eyed Kaintuck.

Among the circle that gathered about him was Whiskey Tunk. Tunk walked up and whacked Kaintuck between the shoulders with the flat of his hand.

"Cheer up, pal; what'n Sam Hill is th' matter with yuh? Brace up an' be a man," he commanded.

"There's nuthin' the matter with me," groaned Kaintuck, "but the damned doctor says they be an' won't let me by so I kin go an' fight. Oh, I tell yer, boys, it's hell."

Kaintuck's sobs could be heard above the laughter of the crowd. Years of dissipation had undermined the vitality of the apparently rugged plainsman and a technical defect barred him from admission into the service.

"Never mind, pal," spoke Whiskey Tunk consolingly, as he patted Kaintuck affectionately on the head. "I reckon I kin do enough fightin' for both of us. Come, git up, an' less go an' have a swig o' red-eye."

The two ambled away, arm in arm, as the crowd cheered.

Gardy was compelled to wait in line about an hour before he was able to present himself to the recruiting officer, while Colonel De Forrest and daughter waited expectantly outside the circle.

Gardy's appearance caused the official in charge of the enlisting, a regular army officer and an experienced connoisseur of men, to gaze for a moment in admiration of the young Southerner's physique. The usual red-taped preliminaries were in order and Gardy was passed on to the surgeon, who, after examination, found the prospective soldier physically perfect.

Gardy, as he made egress from the door of the court house, bore a broad grin. He was now enrolled in the First Regiment, United States Volunteers, or, as unofficially known, Roosevelt's Rough Riders.

His father and sister were among the first to greet

him with congratulations. The girl's sad regret gave way to Spartan stoicism and pride.

"Reckon yo'-all will come back a kunnel or a general," she said, proudly, as the three edged their way through the crowded street in the direction of home.

CHAPTER XXI

THE UNFATHOMABLE MAN

ROCKETS were reddening the heavens and bonfires glared as Jack Morrison was accompanying Patti Shanks home on the evening of the celebration. The breath of early spring had started the buds on the cottonwoods, the poplars and box alders that fringed the ravines, and the outdoor atmosphere, after a severe winter, was inviting. The sole topic of the conversation of the two was the events of the day.

"Well, Mr. Morrison, what do you think of the celebration?" the minister's daughter asked.

"I must confess, Miss Patti, it was noisy enough and rather outshone the big event of last November when we made a clean sweep of the county."

"But do you think you are always going to keep the county right politically? Just think of the great ado they made over the old rebels there today; and the way they entwined their rebel flag with *our* Old Glory! Yes, and the way they cheered when the band played 'Dixie'—and still they prate about their loyalty to the country. Oh heavens! they do make me tired sometimes."

"Oh, well," remarked Jack, placatingly, "this patriotic stuff only lasts until the next campaign; then they'll be waving the bloody shirt again."

The Only Daughter laughed, sardonically.

"But did you see that De Forrest girl," she remarked —"that mountaineer, wearing that red, white and blue dress? Why, it was simply killing. I'll bet it's stained with snuff by this time."

Jack's features whitened and he did not reply for a moment. The insinuation stung him. He stopped suddenly and stared steadfastly at Patti. The light of an ascending rocket revealed anything in his face but an expression of appreciation of her words. She walked ahead a step or two and waited. Jack smiled half-heartedly as he stepped forward and replied:

"Oh, I don't think she dips snuff, does she?'

"Why, don't all the mountain girls dip snuff?"

Yes, he had seen Laura De Forrest. He had been lost in veneration of her in her tri-colored gown—the sweet, innocent creature. But policy governed his every action in life, though Patti's attempt to prejudice him against the Ozark maid caused him to feel resentful. Laura De Forrest was not a snuff-dipper! But then, he must humor Patti.

"Is that so? I'm sure I was not aware of it," he answered, with an ill-concealed air of indifference.

Patti laughed again.

"Oh, Mr. Morrison, I'm afraid you have also succumbed to that 'reunited country' talk that the orators have been dispensing today. Ha-ha! Next thing we know you'll be carrying your little gun and marking time with the rest of the boys."

"I should say not! I couldn't begin to think of leaving my business."

"Not for your country and—and—and— for me, say?"

They had reached the parsonage gate, but Patti still clung to his arm and looked devotedly into his eyes while awaiting a reply.

Jack was nonplused at such a pointed question. He flipped the ashes from his cigar and gazed down at

the shining buckle on her slipper. The inquisitive look still met his gaze as he raised his head.

"I—er—well, but that is different," he said evasively, "but I must be going—"

She refused to release her hold on his arm.

"Can't you come up on the porch and be seated for a little while?" was her invitation. "It's nice and warm tonight."

"Thank you, Miss Patti, but you'll have to excuse me this time as I have some very important matters to attend to that I've been neglecting all day."

She reluctantly let go his arm. He raised his hat, and bade her good-night.

Patti leaned against the gate post and watched him until he disappeared beyond the radius of the nearest arc light. Adorned in her new spring gown that had made its debut on a Sunday but a few days previous, a phantom-like figure she was, as she remained at that station, motionless and endeavoring to make out something in the distance as the rockets scattered myriads of multi-colored sparks overhead. And as the sparks in all their effulgence became dimmer as they neared the earth and finally died out while still in the heavens, she thought of the devotion of man, like the rocket, which shines only while it is in the ascendancy, and finally, toward the end, falls downward, a lifeless and listless thing. Roman candles cast a veil over the sky through which the stars shone—a veil of red, then blue, then yellow, then purple—a color variety for the fickle who might not be devoted to one shade, and through the variegated haze the stars blinked in apparent enjoyment of the inconsistency. And from the town came the ring of brass as the band first played

"Dixie" and then "America"; then the "Bonnie Blue Flag," and then "The Star Spangled Banner." Even the music was fickle, she thought, satisfying the whims of one faction and then another as it blended with the inconstant colors that were flashed alternately on the ethereal canvas above. Even man entered into the great fathomless scheme of things, and as for Jack Morrison—

"He seems to have changed very much of late," she whispered to herself. "I wonder what has gotten into his affairs?"

She turned away from the scene so attractive and so fascinating, yet, she thought, so deceiving. The combustion of pyrotechnics, the blare of resonant brass, the music of the dance halls, were all left behind as she entered the gate, hesitating to glance once more toward the well-lighted town where man, the enigma, was making merry.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STORY OF A ROSE

ANNOUNCEMENT that hostilities had commenced was flashed across the front page of a Kansas City daily paper, copies of which were being sold in Ossineke. The newsboys were almost trampled under foot by eager purchasers.

The formal declaration made by Congress found Ossineke with her full quota of volunteers enrolled. She could have doubled or trebled the contingent from the available men who enlisted, but only one company was allowed her, and the recruiting simmered down to the flower of the best material in the Southwest. Consequently, men who succeeded in getting into the company considered themselves extremely fortunate.

Then came the day of departure for Fort Reno, where a batallion was to mobilize before leaving for San Antonio to join the remainder of the regiment.

It was a proud day, yet sad. The new Southwest was giving its sons willingly to go forth to battle in the tropics. If necessary others would follow.

The Ossineke company had spent several days drilling under the hot sun until they could at least keep step to the "left, left, left" of the drill sergeant, and they were to leave for Fort Reno to continue to drill, drill, drill every day before being transported on their way to the front.

The dust-covered contingent, as it lined up on the railroad station platform that evening, was keyed up to a high degree of expectancy. They were at last going away to fight; that was what they enlisted for. Not carbines, as yet, were they bearing, but each troop-

er carried aloft a small American flag which was waved incessantly to the music of the local band. No natty uniforms were yet evidenced, but the greater portion were in their shirt sleeves, in their laboring clothes, overalls and every kind of nondescript attire.

The entire town and many from about the new county were present to bid the boys good-bye. The stern commands of the officers with difficulty kept the volunteers in line, as they insisted on stepping aside to give a farewell kiss to wife, sister or mother; a parting caress to a sweetheart, or a handshake with a friend. The scene varied all along the line. In some places a wife, sister or mother clung to the neck of a soldier and wept; in other places sweethearts, sisters and parents stood by, smothering their emotions and looking on with self-abnegation.

Interspersing these scenes were the saddest of all—the young man without relative or sweetheart—a comparative stranger with perhaps anxious parents and other near relatives in the far, far East, whom he had not seen for years. There was no loving one to shed a parting tear or greet him with a coquettish smile—but the flowers that were tossed into the air were showered upon all alike.

Standing beside Gardy De Forrest, as the company was formed in two lines, was an athletic appearing young man whose manner marked him as an Eastern aristocrat. Though his hair was parted in the middle and he was smartly dressed, he was far from being effeminate, as his easy carriage and well-developed biceps resembled those of a Yale or Harvard oarsman and his heavy shoulders those of a gridiron star.

Reginald Van Alstyne, an offshoot of one of New

York's millionaire families, had enlisted in the company, coming all the way from his Fifth Avenue home. Through the manipulation of political wires, the young man was soon to wear a sergeant's chevrons in preference to the hundred or more native members of the company. The appointment had caused a grumble to spontaneously arise from the ranks of the contingent and many were the vociferous protests without avail. Thus, the fine-fibered youth, as he stood beside Gardy, was the picture of loneliness, as if without a friend in the world. He was the object of ostracism of his comrades.

Laura De Forrest and her father were standing near Beauregard, the young lady attired in her patriotic gown, more charming and attractive than ever. On her arm hung a basket of flowers. As she tossed bouquets into the air, she watched them until they alighted on the shoulders and hats of the volunteers, then she would laugh joyously.

A large rose dropped onto the rim of Van Alstyne's hat and rolled off to the platform. The Easterner quickly picked it up and fastened it into a buttonhole in his coat. His visage brightened, as he lifted his hat politely and spoke fluently:

"Thank you, lady."

Laura caught the salutation and smiled in return. Calling Gardy out of the ranks, she asked him, semi-audibly:

"Who's that thar nice lookin' fellah, Gardy, beside yo'? He's been lookin' so sad an' lonesome. Hasn't he any kin-folks in these heah pa'ts?"

The brother answered, disdainfully:

"Reckon he's one o' th' dudes from th' East. Th'

boys done hate him 'cause he's been made an ossifer by the gov'ment. Th' boys done say they all hope he'll get killed right on the sta't, they do."

Brother's words aroused Laura and her eyes beamed in sympathy for the lonely New Yorker.

"But, brothah," she pleaded, "he has no mothah or sistah heah to bid him good-bye. He looks like a brave man an' may make a good sojah, aftah all."

"But he's a ca'petbaggah, sis, an'—"

"Nevah mind what he is; he done looks lonesome. Won't yo'-all interjuce him t' me?"

Gardy hesitated, but his sister was determined. Finally the brother jerked his comrade out of the line and awkwardly made him acquainted with his sister and father. The well-bred Van Alstyne charmed Laura instantly while he politely held his hat in his hand and conversed with her. Gardy stood indifferently aside in the meantime, as he was temporarily forgotten. Laura had of late overcome her provincialism and reserve of former years and now felt at ease conversing with strangers.

"So yo'-all are from New Yo'k, are yo'?"

"Yes," replied the Easterner, "my people live there."

"Have yo'-all any sistahs?"

"Yes, three of them."

"An' brothah an' fathah an' mothah?"

"Yes, all of them."

The young man hesitated as if waiting further interrogation, then his eyes merried and he laughed lightly.

"But no sweetheart," he added.

Laura looked downward and blushed.

"How come yo'-all t' these heah pa'ts to enlist?" she asked.

"It was, Miss De Forrest, because I wanted to be in the regiment that would be among the first to go to the front, so my father used his influence to have me appointed a non-commissioned officer."

"Then yo' fathah must be rich." Laura was awe-stricken.

Van Alstyne threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Miss De Forrest," he spoke, "that makes no difference now; we are all Americans. By the way, judging from your accent—if you will permit me to say—you must be from Dixie, aren't you?"

"Yes, suh; we-all are from A'kansaw."

"Indeed? Don't consider me flattering, Miss De Forrest, if I say I've been in the South often and have found the people always charming and hospitable."

The retort courteous was then doubly interrupted by both an officer appearing and ordering the volunteer back into line and the sudden entry of Jack Morrison into the circle. The banker was more affable than usual.

"Good evening, Miss De Forrest," greeted Jack, as he raised his hat. The girl withdrew slightly from his unexpected presence.

"Good evenin', suh," was the cold reply.

"Good evening, colonel," added the Kansan as he gripped the veteran's hand. "I've come to bid Gardy good-bye and wish him well."

"Good-bye, old man, and good luck to you," were the words he used in giving the brother a farewell handshake. The reciprocation was all but warm.

Then turning to Laura, he said:

"This must be a sad day for you and your father, Miss De Forrest, to see your only brother leaving for the front."

"But, suh, we-all are proud of brothah." Her head was erect.

Jack was perplexed. In her dark eyes not a trace of a tear could be seen, whatever were the emotions underneath. He had hoped to sympathize with her, but decided his sympathy would not be acceptable.

"Well, Miss De Forrest," he continued, "it affords me great pleasure—and yet I'm poignant with sadness —to come here and bid those brave fellows good-bye. They are certainly a courageous looking lot of men, and no doubt will give a good account of themselves."

The girl stood statuesque. As the banker looked into her eyes he found them so penetrating that he transfixed his gaze downward. He felt ill at ease.

"Brave men, yo' say?" She surveyed his symmetry from head to feet. "Brave men, an' how about yo'-self, Mr. Mo'son? Why ain't yo'-all done enlistin' an' bein' brave, too? Yo're young an' strong."

"But, Miss De Forrest, you must understand, I'm a business man—a banker—and it would be impossible for me to leave my business and go to the front; it would mean an immense loss to me, you understand?"

The eyes of the girl shone like those of an angered leopardess—eyes that even the boss of men dare not look into. Her breast fluctuated rapidly.

"Bankah! Business man, yo'-all say, an' all yo' think of is makin' money, money, money! Yo'-all stay at home to make money while othah boys enlist t' fight! Yo'-all don't love yo're kentry but yo' love

money better! I'm done su'prised at yo', Mr. Mo'son. Yo'-all are not a brave man; yo're a *coward*!"

The insinuation was like a dagger thrust into his vitals and called for quick resentment. He raised his head, closed taut his hands and leaned threateningly toward her.

"Miss De Forrest, do you mean to say that I'm—"

"Yes, suh, you'-all are a *coward!*"

The assertion was reinforced by the girl's defiant attitude and the muscular forms of both Van Alstyne and her brother who stepped protectingly to her side.

The embryo soldiers near by waved their flags and cheered and onlookers applauded.

Jack Morrison, banker, business man, and great leader of man, found himself subdued and subjugated by an opponent in skirts. For the first time in his life he was whipped! He would gladly have given his entire wealth if the earth had swallowed him on the spot. With his hands in his pockets he disappeared into the human forest just as the conductor roared:

"'Board!"

The girl now relaxed and stepping up to Gardy, threw her arms over his shoulders and kissed him. Her eyes moistened at last.

"Good-bye, brothah; take keer yo'self an' be brave."

"God bless yo', boy," added the father, as he followed with an embrace. "Good-bye!"

Van Alstyne stepped aside and shook hands with the colonel, then to Laura. The tall New Yorker looked down into her face, now tear-streaked.

"Glad to have met you, Miss De Forrest," he bade her as he shook her hand, "and may I keep this rose in remembrance of the sweetest girl in Oklahoma?"

The Ozark maid turned her back and fumbled the ribbon that was suspended from her bonnet. She did not wish to have him see her blush.

The locomotive whistle blew two short, shrill blasts.

"'Board!' bellowed the conductor again as he walked up the platform and gave the engineer the dispatcher's orders.

The train now in motion, Laura turned about but the Easterner had disappeared. As a coach was passing and gradually gaining speed, she caught a glimpse of a young man leaning half way out of the window. It was Gardy.

"Good-bye!" he yelled.

Laura had but time to answer when there appeared the young man from the nation's metropolis in another window. In his hand he held a rose which he brought to his lips while he tipped his hat. The mountain maid's features reflected the carmine of the flower as she waved her handkerchief in reply.

There was a bedlam of cheers and screams, and an effervescence of fluttering flags and handkerchiefs until the last coach disappeared in the haze of alkalied dust in the direction of Fort Reno.

And the band played: "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RESOLUTION

SO I'm a coward, am I?"

Jack Morrison, alone in his richly appointed bachelor apartments, paced back and forth, muttering the sentence again and again. The night was depressingly sultry. He had thrown his coat and hat onto the bed and was too perturbed to attempt to sleep or even be seated.

The humiliation was keen. He, the banker, the political boss, being compelled to retreat before the accusations of a mere girl—the thought of it was unbearable.

So he was a coward, was he? And to be called that by an Arkansawyer—by one whom he imagined at one time that he loved. Well, someone would have to pay dearly for the insult, even if it took all the money he had. But could money do it? He had thought sometimes that, after all, money is not so all-powerful. Just think of the way the crowd fawned over those common every-day fellows going off to war! And how they cheered when he—he, the one who had done so much to build up the town—was insulted by an Arkansawyer!

He stopped in the midst of his reflections, lit a fresh cigar and fell into a cushioned rocker. He gazed dreamily at the blue eddy that was rising spirally to the ceiling.

Yes, after all, "what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world?"—it was strange how that quotation kept bobbing up in his mind—and the picture of that sweet-faced girl that is always with it—not the cross-

patch, dark-eyed vixen that had called him a coward. He couldn't imagine her as the one and same girl. But, hang it all, he couldn't help but admire her sand. He had gone to her with the best of intentions—yes, he was drawn to her by her charming appearance; she looked so sweet and innocent—then to have her insult him. He thought he knew well the ways of women, but here was one that was a puzzler. By the eternal! He'd cut her cold after this. After all, he thought, it doesn't pay to be sociable with some people; they don't know enough to appreciate it. Bah! What did he care for her—he'd forget her; he'd go ahead and play the game in life to win material things as before. T'hell with her.

He threw one leg over his knee and attempted to divert his mind to the rings of smoke he was making, but the one word would not down—it illumined his dreams—the word "COWARD.'

He remained silent for several minutes, studying the head of the bearskin rug on the floor. His eyes appeared vacant and lifeless; the fire on his cigar died out and the white, flaky ashes fell to the floor. The young banker was like one under the spell of some hypnotic influence. Finally his features brightened as if from a new light; the retinas became life-like again and sparkled.

Yes, after all, "what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world!"

Relighting his cigar, he arose to his feet and walked to the open window through which poured the cool evening air.

"I'm a coward, am I?"

It certainly did sting. But John Henry Morrison

was now going to show the world that he could be a man at all times. Yes, it would take courage to give up old friends, old ideals and adopt new ones. By the eternal! He would show them that he could have his mind on something else except grasping for wealth.

He reached the window, looked down upon the partly deserted street and inhaled deeply of the exhilarating nocturnal air. Below him the electric lights in the street sputtered and flickered as hundreds of June bugs, one at a time, obstructed the flow of fluid at the carbon tips but for an instant, to fall, singed and lifeless to the ground until their bodies lay in heaps. Small knots of men, all that could be seen, were gathered around the carts of Aztecan tamale vendors.

He left the window and seated himself on the bed.

Yes, he might as well own up that he lacked moral stamina; he was unclean, unclean. But from this night he would show them that he could be a man among men. He was still young and had much of his life before him, and why should he not change his ways now? There were other ways of showing one's courage aside from fighting for one's country. It would be a hard job to forget the old and strive for new and higher ideals; it would be harder to convince the people that he was sincere, but at the time he met that Arkansas girl at the church social, there was something—he knew not what it was—about her that lifted him to new visions of life. She seemed so sweet and innocent then,—yes, "what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world?" the words that were on the card.

He shuddered as he thought deeply. He could still see those penetrating, dark eyes, the look of scorn—"COWARD"—yes, he was a slacker, but no more. To-

morrow he would face the taunts of the community, but would go before the world with ideals not measured by dollars and cents. Yes, it would take courage; it would be difficult to break away from the old, but had he the courage? Well, he would at least attempt to wipe away the stigma that had been attached to the name of Jack Morrison.

He left the bed, stepped over to the window once more and knocked the ashes from his cigar down onto the sidewalk. He breathed deep lungfuls of the cool air as if to imbibe additional inspiration for his resolution; then, replacing the havana, gazed dreamily out over the lights of the town, the roofs of the buildings and far out over the prairie.

Then, as if to project his thoughts telepathically to the little cottage out on the plains: To the one who had treated him with contempt and called him a coward, he yet hoped to vindicate himself. To her he owed his first inspiration for higher things, only to lose sight of them in his greed for gain.

He set his teeth firmly, contracted the muscles in his fingers and every sinew in his body.

"I can and I will do it!" he murmured in low breath.

A minute or two later found him enwrapped in the sheets of his bed and an eased conscience soon waved the wand of sleep over him.

Not the vision of the illumined word, "COWARD!" vivified his dreams, but that of the angel-faced girl of the Ozarks, in all her kindness and innocence.

"What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world?" he mumbled in his somnolence.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PARTING ROADS

WONDER what's gotten into Jack Morrison lately; he seems like an entirely changed man. He goes about the streets with his head erect and has a pleasing word for everybody. Even the little children he stops and pats on the head—something he never had time to do before—and he seems so sincere about it all, too. He is said to have disposed of the Senate, doesn't frequent the saloons any more, and they say he's also quit gambling."

"Oh, that's very well; but beware of Jack Morrison; there's method in everything he does. Don't put too much confidence in his sudden change of heart."

The above dialogue was a sample of the gossip that was being relayed from lip to lip in Ossineke during the days that followed the episode at the railway station, until it became colloquial. It was in the air, but not so subdued that Jack himself failed to hear it. And he heeded it not.

He was seated in his private office in the rear of the Farmers & Merchants Bank one morning when Edgar Barks entered.

"Good-morning, Jack; how do you feel after the trimming the snuff-dipper gave you at the depot? Pretty strong, eh? Ha-ha!" Barks patted the banker on the shoulder. "And pretty hard to get back at a woman, too."

Jack raised his eyes from the papers he had been examining. His manner took Barks by surprise, for

the gambler expected, at least, the usual smile in return as they would joke over the matter.

"Mr. Barks, I don't care to hear anything more of the affair. Besides, you will do me a favor if you refrain from insinuating about Miss De Forrest being a snuff-dipper."

Barks' eyes widened with amazement.

"Well, I declare! What in the devil has gotten into you of a sudden?"

"Nothing, sir, only she is a lady; and as a man, I'll resent any slur you or anyone else may cast upon her."

The gambler sighed deeply; he studied Jack's features on which was written nothing but earnestness.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get your halo, Johnny?"

The young financier arose from his swivel chair and rested his hand leaningly on the table in front of him.

"Mr. Barks," he spoke decisively, "I have fully made up my mind that money is not the only thing in the world; especially is it not to be obtained at the price of manhood. I have been accused of being a coward—the insinuation stung me, I'll admit. But after a sober second thought, I concluded that I was a coward, and have resolved from now on to at least act the part of a man with my fellow beings."

It was one of those very few instances in which Barks was known to laugh heartily, but he went into a paroxysm of merriment as he had never been known to before.

"Well, well, Jack; which church has roped you in? Pat' been getting in her work on you?"

"None at all, Barks. It is not necessary for me to unite with any church."

The gambler chuckled, and then, sarcastically:

"Jack, you were certainly cut out for a preacher—the Reverend John Henry Morrison. Ha-ha!"

Jack became irritated by the derision.

"I mean every word of it, Mr. Barks."

Edgar Barks' mien changed instantly to that of seriousness.

"What kind of a game are you up to, Jack? Surely to Gawd you're not struck on that dark-eyed, corn-fed girl from the Ozarks—"

"That's enough of that talk, damn you."

Jack's interposition was instant and had emphasis in his bringing his clenched fist with a bang down on the table.

"Furthermore, Mr. Barks," he added, "I'm through with you and your kind. That door yonder is for you and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble if you make your exit as rapidly as possible."

The card man was now like a goaded animal. He leaned far over the table. Facing Jack, he grated his teeth and poked his fist under the younger man's nose.

"Jack Morrison," he hissed, "I made you what you are; you wouldn't be at the head of the Republican party of this county today if it wasn't for me. I've helped you make your wealth by roping in those poor suckers of farmers until they'd have to come to you and borrow money and mortgage their farms. I've played the game side by side with you right along. Damn you, I've made you and I can unmake you, d'you see?"

"That's enough, Barks," spoke up Jack, quickly; "you poor, weak character, you couldn't make or unmake anything. I was simply using you as a tool all

the time and you didn't know it. As for political power, I care not for it any more; I'm through with politics—it's too dirty; I'll devote my time to my business along legitimate lines from now on."

"Jack Morrison," came the retort, "you don't stop to think that I know too much for your own good. If I were to expose you in some of the deals you've been mixed up in, you'd be lynched before another sunrise. Do you want me to tell, Jack?—or, pardon me, the Reverend John Henry Morrison, I should say."

Barks' words were none amiss, as Jack was fully aware. The gambler had it in his power to bring to light enough to put the young banker in a much worse odor than that in which he was held already.

Jack did not answer immediately, but became deeply engrossed while he nervously thumped the ends of his fingers on the table. Visions of divers nefarious schemes in which he had been implicated flitted before him—it was the past, the dark, dismal past that would not down. It stood over him like a hideous monster, ready to crush him. To face the world with new resolutions—to forsake old friends and old ideals was difficult enough; to subdue self required stamina, but to walk erect among men with his blackened antecedents the common talk of every man, woman and child would make the load unbearable, it seemed, to even one of his virility. Had he the strength? Had he the courage? Had he the manhood? The test was a severe one. He looked up at Barks and found him grinning complacently and fumbling his watch fob. The gambler's mood was all but merciful.

The banker felt himself weakening and leaned against the chair for support. The color left his face

as the struggle between the forces within him was mentally tearing him asunder.

"Am I a man or a coward?' he asked himself in his mind.

The answer was the scene that had been indelibly impressed on his memory—the dark eyes, the look of disdain—"COWARD!" The taunting vision stirred him to renewed determination. The color returned to his face as he fully recovered himself, and shaking his fist under the card man's nose, spoke in no uncertain words:

"Barks, you may go and tell what you damned please about me; I'm through with you."

The banker's finger pointed to the door. Barks hesitated and was about to say something, but the unmistakable pose of the banker and the unwavering index finger were sufficient. Jack's former coworker pulled his hat down over his eyes, shoved his hands into his trousers' pockets and strode slowly and sullenly out of the door.

After Edgar Barks had disappeared, Jack relaxed back into his chair.

It was a task; yes, it was hard. Barks and he had played the game together so long—and he became reminiscent of how the card man had been so faithful ever since they first met at Kanokla just before the run. How Barks must have searched the prairies for him that night before he located him at the camp of Colonel De Forrest and his daughter. He had stood by the banker through thick and thin, and he had been such a handy man, too, all these years—good in politics as well as in business—he was so smooth that he had ought to be a winner in most anything.

Jack's head dropped; his hand fumbled over the papers on the table and the cigar ashes fell into his lap unnoticed.

Yes, it was too bad, too bad to cut loose from an old pal like Barks; but there was that girl, that sweet-faced girl—"Blessed are the pure in heart"—Jack believed that was what he had heard the Reverend Shanks say one Sunday in church—he was not sure. Well, if anyone were pure in heart she certainly was; she showed it in her countenance, the angel—no, the fiery one that called him a coward; the one who, Barks insinuated, was a dipper of snuff, damn him, and what was he that he should reflect upon the fair name of Laura De Forrest? He, or anyone else, for that matter—she was so far his superior. Yes, Barks and he had both been mixed up in many deals in the past, but the past was dead with him. Jack wanted to be something else besides a money-grabber. Yes, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world?" Somehow he had a queer sensation whenever he looked upon the girl—something he had never experienced until he had met her that evening when she looked so sweet and innocent in her brand-new gown—something sentimental—he felt himself forgetting everything else—

His eyes caught sight of a mortgage that lay on the table before him and which his cashier had called his attention to as having become overdue and should be foreclosed.

The devil! he thought. He would cut out his little love idea. He was still young and wouldn't let anything like that get into his system.

"Mr. Adams?"

The cashier presented himself as Jack called his name.

"Figure up the interest on this mortgage and inform the parties whom we hold it against that by paying the interest due they can have an extension of six months."

The employe hesitated and stared at his chief for a moment, thinking perhaps there had been a misunderstanding. As he finally wheeled and started for the wicket the banker halted him.

"And I might add, Mr. Adams, that you may inform our customers that the interest rate will be ten instead of twelve per cent from now on."

The cashier in his amazement dropped the document to the floor. He remained as motionless as a statue until Jack assured him that the order had its full meaning.

After the cashier had picked up the mortgage and departed, Jack left his chair, and opening the door, followed him out into the main room of the bank. He made his appearance in time to hear Adams pass the words of the new instructions to the other employes, as well as overhear the chief bookkeeper remark:

"Wonder what's gotten into the boss lately?"

And that night as Jack retired to his room, he realized that another element had entered into the situation. From the time he had shown Barks the door of his private office, the thought became persistent in his mind that he had acted too hastily in breaking with his companion of many years. Had the incident happened at almost any time previous, he might have passed the event on unnoticed and let Barks go his way, but in the regenerating process that was going on, Jack had been

developing a conscience, and with it a keen sense of fairness. He became regretful for what he had said to Barks, without giving him a chance. And at last he decided, that the next time he met Barks, he would extend his hand to him as warmly as before, apologize for his hasty words, and insist on a continuance of their warm friendship. He only wished that Barks would outgrow that provincial prejudice with which he was imbued against everything Southern—the result of the impressions of the gambler's early childhood—of the murderous Quantrell. But if he could not induce Barks to change his ways, he still hoped to retain his warm friendship, even if both followed different paths from then on. And before sleep overcame Jack that night, he had decided to make one more effort to prolong for a time at least the close comradeship of the two. A friendship bordering onto devotion and lasting over many years could not be severed in a day.

CHAPTER XXV

A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

SEVERAL weeks following the departure of the Ossineke contingent from Fort Reno had passed, but there was not the lethargy among the inhabitants of the town usually manifest when the heated term was on. There was much to keep the people keyed up to a high degree as the war news was bulletined and read every day and the papers chronicled the movements of the famous Southwestern Regiment. First the news came from Fort Reno where the batallion had mobilized; then San Antonio, then Chickamauga, and at last the departure from Tampa for Cuban soil. In the midst of it all Yankee guns barked victoriously at Manila Bay, calling for another day of patriotic exuberance in Ossineke.

But there was another sensation that, locally, overshadowed all the exciting events of the war. The Ossineke *Democrat* came out under glaring headlines with several affidavits, signed and sworn to by Edgar Barks, in which he exhumed the record of Jack Morrison's career for several years past and brought to light some of the most nauseating transactions that had ever been heard of in the new country.

The effect was stunning, and even many of Jack's worst enemies doubted its authenticity. But there it was, in cold ink, and signed and sworn to by Jack's former most intimate friend and accomplice.

Laura De Forrest was in the post office on the day of the issuance of the paper, but was absorbed in reading a letter from Beauregard until she heard people

about her commenting on the sensational article. Then it was that she tucked the letter into an opening in her waist and commenced reading a copy of the *Democrat* which she held in her hand.

"Oh, isn't it awful!" she commented with a shudder, as she perused the article. Nearby patrons of the post office discussed it, for the most part, unfavorably to Jack.

"Reckon it's not so," she insisted. "He shore is not as bad an' wicked as all that!"

"But there's the affidavits," spoke up a bystander.

"I know it; they shore enough is thar, but I reckon thar is some good in that man aftah all; I allus reckoned so, anyhow."

"But you accused him of being a coward, didn't you, right to his face?"

"Reckon he is," haughtily replied the girl; "but I reckon that thar Barks is a coward or he done wouldn't print such things in th' papah."

Laura did not wait to listen any more to the gossip of the event, but started for the door. As she passed out into the street, everywhere, and seemingly in everybody's hands, were copies of the local Democratic organ, and about all that she could hear were people reading aloud the story and discussing it.

She passed them unnoticed on the sidewalk, and as she reached the next corner she raised her eyes from the newspaper to behold the banker approaching her. His sudden appearance startled her; then she felt a deep sense of sympathy for him as the crowd gave way before the accused one as if for fear of contamination. From all sides he was mentally taunted, though not a word was said in his presence. She saw him walk

briskly and with considerable poise as if nothing had happened. She marvelled at his proud attitude.

"Will he speak to me?" she asked herself, subduedly, "aftah what I done said t' him at th' depot? He shore don't look like a coward now!"

As he neared the mountain maid she looked up into his smile-garlanded countenance as if seeking recognition. She expected him to tip his hat as usual and her lips were adjusted for the word which was on the end of her tongue in reply to his expected salutation.

Her disappointment was keen, nevertheless, as he passed her without looking either to the right or to the left and without uttering a word. Not that he did not recognize her, but at a glance, his head drooped forward and the light went out of his features to give place to the blue-red of guilt. Yes, he was unclean, unclean.

She turned about and watched him raise his eyes again and walk erect down the avenue of humanity to the post office. She stamped her dainty foot down hard and impetuously on the walk; her head was thrown back archly.

"Well, yo'-all needn't speak if yo' don't want to; an' yo' needn't be so stuck up if yo' are rich," she remarked, half to herself, though her words were overheard by several nearby who could not suppress a smile.

The distance between the post office and her home was made slowly by Laura, due largely to an interesting letter from Gardy which had to be read over and over, especially a paragraph appended to the bottom and signed by Sergeant Van Alstyne.

"Daddy! Daddy! a lettah from brothah," she ex-

claimed, gleefully, as she burst hurriedly through the door into the house and tossed her bonnet to one side.

"Well, well, gal; let's heah what he has to say." The colonel leaned far forward and listened attentively as Laura removed the letter from the envelope and commenced to read:

"Tampa, Fla., June 24, 1898.

"Dear sis an father:

"We done arrived here at last after ridin on the kivered cars a long way from chickmoga. Reckon we all will git outen here soon on one of the big boats that will carry the sojers to Cuby. My but you should see the big boats. sevral of we uns what has not seen big boats afore hav bin lookin at them all mornin. they be bigger than a barn an still they float. All there is is sojers sojers everywhere from all over the united states. All say they are done goin on the fust boat an all want to git to Cuby to fite. Our boys say they will take the fust boat if they hav to fite for it.

"The boys done treat the tenderfoot mean an wont speak to him but i shore am gitting to like him. he is a good feller arter all. the boys wont hav enything to do with me cause i am with the tenderfoot. they call him a carpetbagger an me a razorback an they make fun of both of we uns an say we cant fite but we all will show them when we git to Cuby.

"the boats are floating out in a big creek which is so big i done can't see tother shoar.

"Good by. nex time i rite will be from Cuby.

"Gardy."

Laura still kept her eyes on the letter, reading the lines that followed, in a whisper.

"Is that all, gal?" inquired the father.

A flush of crimson ascended the girl's cheeks to her eyes and she brought the folded linen sheet affectionately to her breast.

"Yeah, daddy—yeah—that's all."

Then unfolding the letter, she reread to herself, as her eyes sparkled with glee, the well written lines at the bottom:

"Dear Miss De Forrest:

"Through the kindness of my comrade and your brother I am permitted to write these few lines, to assure you that the rose, though dead and withered, still finds a place within the folds of my purse. And I am no botanist, either."

"Reg. Van Alstyne."

"Daddy," spoke the girl, inquisitively, "what is a botanist?"

"Why, gal?" he responded, surprisedly, "What's that got t' do with th' lettah?"

"Oh, nuthin'."

Laura was about to bring the parchment to her lips as the dream-like scene of the handsome, athletic Easterner, who bade her farewell at the station, loomed up before her, when the words of her parent brought her down to the present moment again.

"An' did yo'-all fetch home the papah, gal?"

"Oh, yeah, daddy; here it is; it's awful, awful what it has to say of Mr. Mo'son. I'll get yo're specs, daddy, so as yo' can read it as I can't bear to read it fo' yo'."

His glasses adjusted, Colonel De Forrest read the article to himself while Laura stood at the window and looked wistfully out over the sun-baked prairie. When he had finished he raised his head and saw her stamp her foot perturbedly on the rough board floor.

"I don't believe it; I don't believe it!" she exclaimed, and then returned her attention to the window.

Colonel De Forrest removed his glasses and his countenance took on the lines of perplexity in addition to those of age.

"Why don't yo'-all believe it?" he asked. "I reckoned all th' time he was a scalawag, an' heah his own bosom comrade done swears it's so; an' it mus' be so or it wouldn't be in th' *Democrat*, would it? Why gal, I reckoned all along that Jayhawker be a bad un—yes he be—th' wuss kind of a Yankee—"

"There, there, daddy!"

Laura left the window and stood facing her parent.

"Don't say 'Yankee' any mo' when speakin' of scalawags," she continued, reprovingly. "Don't yo'-all know we are all Yankees now?"

The old man rested his hands and head on the crook of his cane and looked down upon the floor for a moment, and then:

"Yeah, gal; I done guess yo'-all are right."

"An' that thar Barks is a coward or he wouldn't print that awful thing about Mr. Mo'son," added Laura, earnestly.

"An' that makes two cowa'ds, does it, gal?"

"No, I don't think, aftah all, Mr. Mo'son is sich a coward. I done seen him walk up th' street today an' he was as proud as a kunnel. A man shore can be no coward when all th' people say bad things about him an' be as proud as he be."

"But, Laura, gal, have yo'-all done fo'gotten that th' scalawag tried to take this heah homestead from us aftah we done squatted on it an' it was ours?"

"Yeah, daddy, I do remembah it all, but it's not

ours by rights. Don't yo' recollect that we'-uns was Soonahs? An' if Mr. Mo'son could prove we'-uns was Soonahs, he done could take this place from us?"

"Soonahs? What yo'-all mean by 'Soonahs'?"

"Reckon that's what they called people who squatted on th' land befo' th' big run."

Sooners was right. The De Forrests had entered upon the land the day before the opening, having come in from Arkansas across the Indian Territory by escaping the cavalry patrol along the line. Once there, they squatted, and it was only Jack Morrison's intense Republicanism, together with his lack of evidence, that prevented the Democratic land officer from deciding in his favor. And Colonel De Forrest fully realized the justice of Jack's claim.

"Right yo' be, gal; right yo' be," he finally admitted and hung his head like one with a deep sense of guilt.

To the window once more turned Laura as if to seek solace for her agitated mind in the vista of yellow fields from which heat waves of the summer radiated. To her, Jack had been maligned. Be that as it may, the insinuations of Barks in his published affidavits could not be true. She had met Jack face to face at the acquaintance social; she had looked into his shrewd gray eyes and fathomed his thoughts. In those orbs she had perceived a spark of something—something, she knew not what, that was weighed down under selfishness and that which is coarse in man; which needed only to be kindled to glow into all that is best within him. It was the light of his soul that had occultly convinced her through its windows of gray that the seed of a better idealism within only needed the rich soil of

a beautiful character to burst forth from its chrysalis state and blossom forth in all the glory of manhood which God had intended it should. Though all the world be against him; though the taunting fingers of the rabble be pointed at him from all sides, she alone realized that there was a better side to his makeup that could not be brought out by persecution. Grasping Jayhawker as he was, she could not believe that within him was the abode of everything evil. True, he would not relinquish his desire for wealth and power to enlist and fight for his country, but the gray eyes had telepathically sent her a message that she carried in her heart, be he coward or no coward. She felt that she had it in her power to use a better clay in which to mold his character; but then, she sighed as the thought came to her: he was rich and influential, while she was but a poor, modest maiden, whose life had been carved out by her simple environments in the Ozarks.

In a way, she felt that she had done wrong in accusing him of being a slacker. Now that he was the object of scorn in the community, he needed sympathy. There were hundreds ready to crucify him, but not one voice to be raised in his behalf.

Then it was that the fine character of the simple-lived girl asserted itself. Jack Morrison had wronged many people, it was true; but a deep and abiding sense of right and wrong prevailed within her. By rights, the De Forrest homestead was his—she would go and tell him, come what may. One of the accusations Barks had made in the *Democrat* was that Jack had plotted to rob the De Forrests of their home. And the homestead was, by rights, his!

She had barely time to reach the bank before it

would close. Picking up her bonnet and merely informing her father that she would return directly, she bolted out of the door and was soon moving rapidly down the road under the blazing sun toward Ossineke.

Laura was breathing heavily from fast traveling as she paused in front of Jack's financial institution. Inside the employes were balancing ledgers preparatory to storing them away in the vault. Could she find him there? Would he be too busy to receive her? She peered in at the stack of currency piled up behind the wicket, and everything about the place had a cold, none-but-business air. And as there is no sentiment in business, she felt that, perhaps, the impulse to tell the story of her heart to Jack might have been ill-advised. She glanced furtively up and down the street, half abashed, and felt like retracing her steps. But the burden remained on her conscience; it had to be unloaded.

Into the bank she stepped, timidly, but the polite greeting of the cashier tended to relieve her.

"Ken I see Mr. Mo'son?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," replied the cashier, "but Mr. Morrison is busy in his office just now. Won't you be seated for a moment? He'll soon be through."

Laura felt crestfallen and intimidated, but the load simply had to be removed; it was on a feminine mind and to tell it was imperative. She was cogitating whether to remain for awhile or return home, when the door leading into Jack's private office opened and from it issued a business appearing man who walked out onto the street.

"You may see Mr. Morrison now if you wish, Miss

De Forrest," informed the cashier as he stepped to the door and opened it for her.

Laura, for a moment, felt her courage leaving her. She hesitated. Would she have the strength to make a confession to a man whom she had accused of cowardice? Would he recognize her at all, let alone listen to her? But there was something within the private office of the town's rich man—something that seemingly drew her in. She found herself timorously standing before him as he was seated at his desk, deeply absorbed, as he was, in some documents. It seemed to her ages before he looked up. Presently the banker raised his eyes and was so startled by her presence that he dropped his cigar to the floor.

"Why, Miss De Forrest, good evening! Won't you be seated?"

He arose and proffered her a chair which she timidly occupied; then he reseated himself.

"What can I do for you?" he inquired.

Laura raised her head, shaking it slightly to throw back a lock of black hair that hung annoyingly over her eyes, and nervously patted the knot of hair which was neatly done up on the back of her head. In his eyes was not the cold ray of commercialism, but instead, the warm one of kindliness—not the resentment she expected for her brusque treatment of him at the depot. Laura endeavored to find words to give expression to what she had to say, but they were not available. She felt uneasy and longed to be back in the humble prairie home. A glance at Jack revealed still the kind, sympathetic gaze. At last the words overcame the lump in her throat:

"Mr. Mo'son."

"Yes, Miss De Forrest."

"I done come t' tell yo'all that—that— we'-uns was Soonahs."

"Sooners? Why, what do you mean, Miss De Forrest—"

"Recollect when th' big run was made?"

"Yes, I certainly do."

"An' yo'-all sta'ted to stake out a claim?"

The banker scratched his head but the vision of his looking down the barrel of a six-shooter in the hands of a youth claiming previous possession became clear.

"Yes, I remember it all."

"Well, I reckon we'-uns had no right to the claim, 'cause we done come onto it befo' th' openin'. Th' claim is yo'-uns, by rights."

Jack was at first taken by surprise by her confession; then he leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Why, Miss De Forrest, that's all settled. I know I contested your brother's right to the homestead and lost, and let that end it. I've thought of it no more."

The young lady still felt unrelieved.

"But did yo'-all see what Mr. Ba'ks said in the papah about it?"

The banker suddenly ceased laughing and the red of merriment left his face. He leaned forward and rested on his elbow.

"Yes, I saw it, Miss De Forrest, and it cut me to the quick. It is all too true, I assure you, and Laura—er—Miss De Forrest, I should say, that it was because I have thrown Barks over that prompted him to publish that stuff. But, believe me, it all belongs to the past and the past is dead with me."

His eyes were then diverted dreamily to the window and he sighed. He became morose.

"I know they're all down on me," he continued, "but I assure you that I am at least endeavoring to undo the wrongs that I've done."

He arose, paced the floor and bit his lower lip, and then:

"It's hard, I tell you, it's hard; and they won't give me a chance."

Laura sat motionless in her chair, not knowing what to make of his actions. Then she spoke:

"But, Mr. Mo'son, I done come to tell yo that yo' have been accused wrong about our homestead, an' I done want to—"

"There, there, little lady." He paused as he was moving toward the window, pivoted and faced her. "Don't mention it. The property is your brother's to keep—you may rest assured of that."

But the girl was pertinacious. She arose and started for the door.

"But I mus' tell 'em that Ba'ks done been wrong."

"Never," responded the banker, promptly—"never will your name be brought into this matter. I alone can bear the brunt of the attack in the *Democrat*."

The man's gallantry strongly appealed to Laura.

She continued moving toward the door and Jack followed her. He opened the door for her, extended his hand and was about to bid her good-bye, when she hesitated and looked timidly down at the floor. There was another burden from which she must relieve herself.

"Mr. Mo'son," she finally spoke, with a soft, musical tremolo in her voice, "I'm—I'm very sorry I done called

yo'-all a coward 'tothah evenin'; I mus' have been awful mad."

Jack held her hand—an artistic, soft, velvety hand, slightly calloused on the palms from work in the fields. His eyes blinked merrily.

"Oh, that's all right, Miss De Forrest," he assured her; "guess I deserved it—we're all apt to lose our temper at times."

She bade him good-bye and disappeared out the door, her conscience greatly lightened and leaving him in the Gethsemane of one trying to forsake old gods for the new.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT LAST THEY CLASH

HE cashier and bookkeepers who remained in the Farmers & Merchants Bank after its doors had been closed for the day, balancing up the day's business, were there when Luara passed through from Jack's private office. One of the employes unlocked the front door and let her out onto the street, then resumed his work. The day's labor soon finished, the workers were only too glad to get out of the hot building into the open, leaving the banker alone in possession, pacing back and forth in his private office.

Although Jack put on a bold front in public and paid no attention to the soul-thrusts of his accomplice in the *Democrat*, yet, after all, under the smiles with which he continued to greet people there was anguish —the torn soul of a man facing the scorn of the world and yet endeavoring to forget the past and building life and character upon a new foundation.

There was one star, however, whose rays pierced the cloud that overhung him—a cloud, that at times, seemed about to submerge him—but the star lighted the way.

And that she would come and confess to him that her family were Sooners! And but a few days after she had chided him for his cowardice! Woman, thy name is mystery! How easy would it be for him to use her name to exonerate himself in the homestead grabbing contest that Barks attempted to show up in the paper! But he would never bring her name into the controversy, even if he had to bear the stain all

his life. No, he would fight the thing through himself.

Jack made strides to the window and back again, keeping up the movement rapidly and smoking incessantly. At last he stopped to gaze out onto the cold, indifferent world. It was a relief to be in seclusion away from the taunting eyes of humanity; it was added solace to have been paid a visit by a sympathizing angel.

Down deep in his soul he felt a keen sense of gratitude. Could he repay her for her kindness? With money? Yes, money, money, money was still the only measure of value in his mind. It persistently remained in his day-dreams—the Old Adam was hard to down. Would he do anything in the world for her? Would he *die* for her? Could he love her?

Yes, he could. But he was unclean, unclean. He had yet to conquer self; he had yet to convince the world that he could subdue self. But the battle was well on.

Picking up his hat and throwing his coat over his arm, he ventured forth into the street, locking the front door of the bank behind him.

As he thrust the keys into his pocket who should he meet face to face but his former associate, Edgar Barks. The card man was ambling down the sidewalk with a self-confident swing and an egotistic poise when the two met. The gambler smiled the sinister smile for which he was noted, and his eyes glistened tauntingly.

Jack was pleased to have a chance so soon to meet his old-time companion, so eager was he to resume and retain their friendship of old. As the two met,

Jack extended his hand and was the first to speak, though Barks was slow in grasping the hand proffered him and a somewhat surprised look spread over his face.

"Well, Barks, old pal," greeted Jack, as he laid his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder; "I've been wanting to meet you for some time. I've been wanting to apologize to you for the abrupt manner in which I treated you in my office the other day. I'm sorry for what I've said and done."

Jack withdrew his hand from the shoulder of his ally of many years, and drew a puff or two from his cigar; then, while Barks stood stolidly with a sinister, half-suspicious squint in his eyes, the banker continued:

"Ed, that was great stuff you published about me in the *Democrat*, but, I guess I'll have to admit that it was all too true." His laugh made Barks uneasy. "But be that as it may, Ed, I'm through with the kind of a life I've been leading. I tell, you, Ed, there's nothing to it in the long run. Barks, we've had many interesting and profitable times together, but we're on the wrong track. The biggest blunder we've made is trying to keep up this sectional feeling, when this war with Spain is wiping out the Mason and Dixon line."

Barks' eyes glistened savagely.

"Then again," continued Jack, "this frontier life is going to pass in time—this country is going to become 'civilized' as I might say—the time is coming when there'll be no more rough stuff, no more gun plays, and you'll perhaps notice that already the strong grip of law and order is beginning to tighten. Barks, I'm sick and tired of it all. I only wish you could see

things as I do, but it's not for me to tell you what kind of a life to lead—that's your business—but if you really must go your way and I go mine, I still want to be friends with you."

Barks rested his hands on his hips, and then, disdainfully, and with a sarcastic grin:

"Jack, I see the rebel element has won you over—"

"No, no, Ed; not that. But you must bear in mind, there's no such thing as 'rebel' now that this war started—all hell can't stop those Southerners from enlisting, and you might as well talk to that brick wall over yonder as try to revive that old Civil War stuff among the people any more—they're all Americans—"

"Ah, the devil," retorted Barks disgusted. "You're trailing in with the wrong crowd, Jack, and you'll regret it."

Jack extended his hand once more, Barks grasping it coldly, and then he spoke, somewhat reluctantly:

"Well, Ed, I see there's no hope of us continuing to play the game together, but, nevertheless, I'll forget what you said about me in the paper, and let us continue to be friends; you go your way and I go mine."

"So, Johnny, you're getting too aristocratic for me"—

"Not at all, Barks, but above everything else let's not let our friendship cease."

"Ah, hell," grunted Barks, as he half turned to one side.

Jack hesitated for a moment as if nonplused as to what to say, and then with a friendly feeling:

"The trouble with you, Barks is, that Quantrell affair has made you cynical and narrow-minded so

that you can't see any good in any Southerner. Forget it."

But Barks was beyond having his ways changed. A feeling of resentment came over him as to what he considered the younger man's "preaching."

"I've heard enough of that stuff, Morrison," he snapped back. "I *am* going my way, and you'll either trail in with me or none at all—"

"I will like the devil," quickly replied Jack, who was now losing his patience.

"Then you can go to hell."

In spite of his efforts to subdue himself in order to retain the partnership of Barks, Jack was becoming enraged. The other man was about to leave him, but had only proceeded a short distance when he turned. The sinister smile for which he was noted prevailed, and his eyes glistened tauntingly as he spoke:

"Well, Johnny, old boy, I see the little dame leaving your office a moment ago—pretty smooth, eh? squaring yourself with her? Made a date to have her up in your room tonight?—"

"You cur!" muttered Jack, as he approached Barks and dropped his coat to the sidewalk. In an instant he shot his right fist forward, striking Barks a battering ram blow in the teeth, knocking the cigar into the air and sending the gambler sprawling into the gutter. "Say what you want about me, but, damn you, you rat, don't make a single remark about her or I'll kill you."

Barks had been taken by surprise. He arose, mopped the blood from his mouth and glared at the banker with fiery, savage eyes. He removed his coat and threw it to the ground, then rubbed his palms and rolled up his sleeves. There was no gainsaying that

Jack had aroused a lion. Then the battle began, with naught but their fists as weapons, each viciously pummeling the other, sparring, evading blows, tripping, with little science of the ring, but as two cave men ungoverned by any conventionalities. On one side was the dogged pride of a man bent on resenting the attack of the other; on the other side the gallant spirit of a man, the inherent protective spirit of the strong over the weak, in defending the honor of a woman.

A crowd of enthusiastic men began to gather about the two battlers, and with primeval masculine glory in a physical combat between two of their kind, they circled close; they yelled and cheered.

It was an even fight for several minutes, first one knocking his opponent to the ground and then the other. But the banker had the advantage of youth and vitality, the other a constitution more or less undermined by dissipation. It was not long until Barks became groggy, his blows became weaker, and on the other hand the banker was just beginning to warm up. The crowd now commenced to cheer the prospective winner. Both were bleeding profusely and their shirts were torn in shreds. At last Jack struck the gambler a blow on the ear that sent him spinning and he fell face downward in the gutter. He made several attempts to arise, but was too exhausted; then rolling over on one side, he reached into his pocket and produced a six-gun. He was about to aim it at Jack.

"Shoot, you rat!" challenged the banker.

"Ornery! ornery!" bellowed men in the crowd in derision of the defeated one. "You're a coward."

Instantly a heavy boot fell upon Barks' wrist and pinned it to the ground before he could pull the trig-

ger. A rugged hand then reached down and took the gun away from him.

Jack Morrison, who recently had been looked upon askanse by the people of the town as the result of Barks' exposure in the newspaper, was now the hero of the hour. Men of the frontier, worshippers of masculine fighting qualities, gathered about him, patted him on the back and shook hands with him.

"Good boy, you did well," was but one of the many commendations hurled at him. But none were aware of the real cause of the affray, naturally supposing that it was the result of Barks' attack on his former associate in the *Democrat*; that the gambler had double-crossed his pal and was deserving of a beating, as double-crossing in those days was as malodorous as the purloining of horseflesh. So the frontier minds reasoned it out.

Jack broke away from the admiring crowd as soon as possible and went upstairs to his rooms over the bank. There he bathed his wounds, which fortunately consisted mostly of a slight slit beside his ear, redressed and then came down to his office.

The telephone bell rang and he walked over and adjusted the receiver to his ear.

"Hello!"

"Hello!" came from the other end. He recognized the voice as that of Patti.

"Ah, the devil!" he thoughtlessly muttered.

"What's that?" came back over the wire.

"Oh—er—I said: 'What do you want?' "

"Well, well! You must be a very busy man. Here we have been waiting dinner for you for more than a

half hour. You must have forgotten your appointment."

Jack glanced at his watch, apologized for his tardiness and informed his guest that he would be there at once.

"The Dickens," he remarked to himself, as he hung up the receiver, "I'd rather take a licking than go up there."

He was not in the proper mood, he thought, but then, the parson and he had been playing the game together and he couldn't pass him up like he did Barks. And Patti—he shook his head—she was certainly getting on his nerves.

He locked the bank door behind him and walked erect and lithely in the direction of the North Jerusalem parsonage.

He was greeted warmly at the threshold and soon the guest and clerical family were seated about the festive mahogany.

Jack feared the conversation might lead to recent events wherein the newspaper sensation was uppermost, but the members of the family and he discussed the war and the usual affairs of the town instead. Following the repast, the remainder of the evening was very pleasantly passed in the reception room, Patti's musical talent adding very much to the entertainment.

The alternate purple and gray terraces in the west had disappeared and in their place was the light of the stars. It was then that Jack asked to be excused, and thanking the Reverend and Mrs. Shanks, proceeded out onto the porch, accompanied by Patti. His hat was presented reluctantly by the young lady, and he was about to bid her good-night when she clung to

his arm. He perceived a film in her eyes as she looked up into his.

"Jack," she spoke in a low voice, "is it true? It certainly can't be—not all of it."

Jack well knew that she referred to the recent newspaper sensation and turned his head evasively to one side.

"Yes, Patti," he answered; "it's all too true."

She clutched tighter his arm and leaned against his shoulder until her cheek nearly touched his and he could feel her warm breath surge against his face like the billows of Eternity breaking against the rocks of Time. He inhaled the aromatic perfume in her hair; he felt her hart beat in a steady, musical tempo—a warm, delicate, breathing thing she was that attached herself to him.

"No, no," she insisted, impulsively; "it cannot be; I will not believe it."

Jack fumbled his straw hat and still eluded her inquisitive stare.

"Yes, it is true—true to the word, and I'm not going to be the man to deny it."

"Oh, this is awful," she sobbed. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Do nothing, Pat; only live a different life from now on. I have firmly made the resolution; I will try to live down the past."

"But if I were you I would go to some other place and start anew."

Jack lifted his head and looked straight into her moistened eyes.

"Patti," he spoke, decisively, "I will not run in the

face of fire; I will be a good soldier and fight it out."

He relapsed into moodiness again.

"But for you, Patti," he continued, "you'd better not have anything more to do with me until the stigma is removed. You'll do yourself justice by leaving me to myself, for the present, at least."

"Never!" she answered. The word was conclusive.

Both remained momentarily silent. Then Patti spoke:

"Do you know, Jack, that they held a meeting of the official board of our church today, and in spite of my father's protest they decided not to accept any more of your liberal contributions, saying the money was tainted? I hated to tell you, but thought you might as well know now."

Jack stepped back and replied, indignantly:

"Is that the kind of a religion your church has? Yes, when I was popular your elders accepted my money freely, but now that my past has been laid bare, they propose to reject it. Notwithstanding my earnest desire to live a better life, your church would further test my courage and join in the popular clamor to have me persecuted. Yes, my money was good before, but now it's tainted; though I'm a better man now than I was then—"

"But, Jack—" interposed the minister's daughter.

"No explanations are necessary, Pat. It's difficult enough to beat it back; it's hard enough to attempt to live up to new and better ideals—to forsake old friends, and one feels the need of some superhuman help, but it will never be asked for through your church. I've stood by the North Jerusalem church through thick and thin and helped tide it over many bad financial

periods, but now I'm unpopular, your church members are among the first to throw stones. Patti, in spite of the official board, I'm going to live it out. Yes, my money was tainted—strange they never knew it before; but it will be given for the benefit of humanity along different lines from now on and not to support some narrow-minded creed that recognizes a man only when he's on top."

"But, Jack," pleaded Patti, "you don't blame our family, do you?"

"No, no, I do not; I certainly appreciate your friendship and that of your father and mother. I must be going—"

"But, Mr. Morrison," she insisted, as she still clung to his coat, "remember,"—there was a tremor in her voice—"you may count on me as your friend at all times."

Such fidelity was not expected by Jack. He had never encouraged her to be anything but a friend to him; but her words bordered on that of devotion and he was compelled to recognize the fact.

"Thank you, Patti," he replied, with a touch of affection. "It's very kind of you to say that—but I must leave."

The fingerhold let loose of his arm reluctantly. Her hand went to the side of his face.

"What's that, Jack?" she asked, curiously. "There's a bad scar on your face? What have you been doing to yourself?"

"That? Oh,—er—oh, that's just where I cut myself while shaving—I shaved in a hurry just before I came up here—that's nothing; it will soon disappear."

He bade her good-night as he moved down the

steps. She followed him to the gate. His hat was lifted in a parting salutation and she watched him until his shadow against the downtown lights faded away.

Jack had again departed, leaving his soul fathomless to her. On the surface floated the deadwood of business expediency and the flotsam of mere friendship, but underneath was yet to her naught but mystery. Did he love her? Could he love her, she thought, and perhaps after all she had been too impulsive—too ready to exemplify her devotion, which, according to the criteria of her sex, was untactful. Then had she made a mistake in offering to be with him as against the world? It was a sublime sacrifice of womanly reserve—a splendid offering on the altar of Eros. But what was the response? An abrupt "Good-night," and the disappearing shadow of The One from her presence, maybe never to return. But no, she would not have it that way. He would return. Infinite Hope prevailed. Did he say he was living a new life? Then, perhaps after all, his heart would be more susceptible to her adoration of him than before. He would think less of sordid things—like business and politics and his personal ambitions. She could be a help to him in his ambitions, she thought—she even had intimated to him at times that she could (another offering), but the intimation had the effect of the kiss of waters on the Rock of Ages. And yet he was well along in the twenties and otherwise a man of serious thoughts—not given to frivolity—and hadn't he always been kind to her—and very attentive? No—she breathed rapidly as a myriad of thoughts ran through her mind —thoughts in which she balanced his actions in the

past and attempted to arrive at a sum total as a basis on which to determine his relations toward her—but the balance sheet showed only the cold relation called friendship—the items were confusing, misleading and perplexing and finally ended in a jumble from which no result could be obtained.

But in the midst of the confusion, through the dark cloud of uncertainty, she perceived a light—Hope, the star that pierced the gloom of his indifference, and listening, Love heard—naught but the distant trumpeting of the nighthawk. But Hope beckoned, and Love followed, groping blindly past the clouds, as it has since the beginning of time when life was first placed on the earth—the primal instinct of life, and without which life would be a vapid, listless eon, without form and void.

"I love him," she whispered, with a deep inflation of her lungs—too faint to be echoed, but answered by a slight night breeze which affectionately brushed aside a lock of brown from her face as if by an adoring hand, while the astral gods and goddesses mirrored themselves in self-admiration on the jewels of her necklace.

She left the gate post and retired slowly to the parsonage, only hesitating once more to gaze in the direction of the down town streets, in an effort to make out something in the mute shapes of buildings and the sputtering lights that challenged the stars for luminary supremacy.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE AMBUSH

GARDY'S regiment of dismounted cavalry was among the first to land on Cuban soil after the shore had been shelled by the guns of the American fleet.

Leaping from the lighters, the hardy men of the Western plains waded through the surf to the shore, giving vent to their elation over being at last on enemy soil with whoops and yells that made the sharp commands of their officers inaudible. They were men in their prime, spilling over with masculine energy—fighting energy—men in whose veins flowed the red blood of the race of Drake and Frobisher—pink-skinned Anglo-Saxons as they mostly were, to once more be pitted against the dusky Latin.

Pink-skinned Anglo-Saxons they mostly were, yet no foreign legion had ever been more composite. Tent-mated together were bronzed cattlemen of the West and young university students of the East. Southern Mountaineer kept step with men from Kansas. There was a sprinkling of full-blooded Indians from Indian territory, and among the white men were a number whom the sheriffs of every county in the territory were looking for and whose photos were conspicuous in the offices of United States marshals. There was "Bucky" O'Neil and his Arizonans, Luna and his New Mexicans—Luna himself of Spanish *conquistador* descent, as were many members of his company. There were Captain Capron, Sergeant Thomas and others, who with O'Neil were among the list of names to be immortalized in connection with the achievements of

this magnificent regiment later on at Las Quasimas, El Caney and San Juan.

Tropical clouds gathered in daily ensemble and opened up their heavenly batteries, sending down on the blue-shirted and khaki-trousered soldiers their pluvian legions as if the elements themselves had formed an alliance with the enemy to resist the advance of the invading force. Then the clouds withdrew from the field of action; the seering shafts of the tropical sun, like a force of reserves, followed with an attack on the defenseless volunteers and soon had a cloud of steam arising from their bodies like smoke overhanging opposing lines in battle.

Camp was pitched on the beach reluctantly, as the men, with eager countenances looking landward, were in high mettle, weeks of inactivity having energized them. They had enlisted to fight and were impatient to reach the firing line.

Beauregard De Forrest and Sergeant Reginald Van Alstyne found the ostracism they had been subjected to at the hands of their comrades a welding influence in their mutual companionship. After a night spent in a tent together, during which the occasional thunder of war craft's guns and attacks by land crabs kept them from slumbering, the two were among the first to be up whe nreveille was clarioned. A breakfast consisting of hard-tack, coffee and some canned beef greened about the edges was devoured, then the regiment lined up for advance.

"I reckon we'-all are goin' t' git a shot at them thar Spaniards today," exultantly ventured the Arkansawyer to his tent mate beside him.

"I hope so," returned the Easterner, in confidence.

"We'll show those other chaps that we didn't have to ride horses on the plains all our life to know how to fight. They—"

"Fours right—m'ch!" snapped an officer in staccatto.

The men in each company wheeled and started off in fours. The movement was executed with such alacrity that Gardy's prodigious feet interfered and he stumbled, thereby inviting a reprimand from the lieutenant who was stepping militaresque beside him. Troopers in the line behind him jeered. Whiskey Tunk, among them, drawled derisively:

"Wa'al, razorback, have ye an' th' carpetbagger written yer wills yet?"—

"Halt!" abruptly roared the captain. The tread of yellow-laced leggings stopped.

"Fours left!"

The company was in line formation again, facing the jungles, and down the beach stretched the other squadrons in a continuous thread of blue and khaki. Gardy pulled the brim of his hat down over one eye and with the other squinted belligerently at the dense vegetation. The command was relayed down the line to advance, and simultaneously the entire regiment disappeared into the thicket.

So closely formed was the tropical flora that all attempts at company and regiment formation were dispensed with, and in squads of various numbers the blue-bloused men advanced.

Gardy and Van Alstyne fell in with a detachment of about a dozen who were following an old trail. At first, the forward movement was made cautiously; but

after several hours scouting without encountering the enemy the troopers became overconfident.

"The damned battleships raised hell in drivin' th' dagoes outen th' woods here so we can't get a crack at 'em," spoke a soldier, as he hesitated to remove his sombrero and mop the sweat from his forehead.

"Yep, an' I'll bet a bottle of red-eye they won't stop runnin' till they git to Spain," added Whiskey Tunk whose knowledge of geography was not cognizant of a vast ocean between Cuba and the mother country.

The intense heat was sickening, but the troopers never complained. Jackets had long ago been discarded and now some commenced throwing away their knapsacks, canteens and other impedimenta.

On and on, across stagnant waters, under low hanging mosses and palm branches, the volunteers trudged as joyously as in a Fourth of July parade. Someone started singing "Marching Through Georgia," and the entire detachment joined in the song except Gardy. He would have willingly lent his deep basso to the chorus of any national air but that melody of Northern triumph. After the last stanza had been sung, the Arkansawyer rent the momentary stillness with the loud suggestion that "Dixie" be the next number. It was received with guffaws and—

"T'hell with Dixie," shouted a trooper back to him. "Don't you know we're all Yankees now, you hillbilly?"

"I reckon I'm going to sing Dixie if I have to sing it alone," retorted Gardy.

"Hospital!" yelled out Whiskey Tunk, before Gardy could tune his voice up to the desired pitch.

The squad halted and every man turned about

excitedly on his heels. The lieutenant, who was in the lead, ran back to where Tunk was on his knees, stooping over the limp form of a trooper and bathing the sunburnt, leathern face with water from his canteen.

"Did they get him? I heard no report," nervously inquired the officer while the soldiers once more faced the jungles that were echoing the click-click-click of their cocked carbines.

"Nope," assured Tunk, "he's jus' sunstroke; I'll take him o'er in th' shade an' he'll come to in a jiffy."

It was not necessary. The man's eyes opened and the color returned to his face. He clutched at his throat violently, squirmed, and arose to a sitting posture, staring vacantly through wild, glassy eyes.

"Lay down, hang ye!" ordered Tunk; "don't y' know ye're sunstruck?"

"I am like hell! I'm worth a dozen dead men—thought th' blankety-blanks had got me—lemme go ahead!"

Despite Whiskey Tunk's protestations, the trooper staggered to his feet, imbibed a draught of water from a canteen and stumbled on.

As the noonday hour approached the heat increased in intensity. At times men staggered and fell to their knees, the embalmed beef having a deadly effect on the men whose vitality was otherwise tested to the limit in resisting Apollo's shafts.

The mid-day shower came up, but the men never whimpered or hesitated; they tramped on, singing, jesting and swearing, and not stopping even to seek shelter under the palms. The clouds emptied them-

selves, then dispersed, leaving the earth to steam under the boiling sun.

The base of a low elevation was reached, around which the dense forest made the trail like twilight. Some distance up from the base and leading to the ridge was a forest of royal palms.

The soldiers were in the midst of a song, when crack-crack-crack came the report of several Mausers. The singing ended instantaneous with the z-z-zing of bullets.

"Where in the devil are they?" asked the Americans of each other, as they dropped to their knees and peered amid the foliage, expecting to see smoke, but none was discernable. The captain was the only one to remain erect. His appearance was imposing and soldierly, as he cooly sheathed his pistol into the holster and lit a cigaret.

"Lay low, boys," he ordered, subduedly; "we're liable to be ambushed."

Whiskey Tunk smiled up at his superior.

"Better git down yerself, cap, or they'll plug ye."

"There ain't a Spanish bullet made that ken kill me," laughingly returned the laconic captain.

Another Mauser barked, the gallant officer threw up his hands and fell face downward, a bullet in his heart.

The sight of their dead leader enraged the men. Whiskey Tunk, among others, ripped out an oath of revenge as he caught a glimpse of a Spanish sharpshooter in a tree. He brought his carbine to his shoulder, took careful aim and brought down the Castilian.

"Bullseye!" he shouted triumphantly.

Gardy moved about nervously on his knees.

"Don't get skeered, razorback," admonished Tunk.

"Skeered, nuthin," returned Gardy. "I'm lookin' fo' a Spaniard—oh, I see one yondah." Resting his elbow on his knee, he fired. "Take that, damn yo'-all, an' remembah th' Maine."

He was as proud of his first victim as he had been of his entrée into Senate circles.

By this time the firing became general along the entire line—the first battle of the war was on. A lieutenant colonel wearing glasses and with smoking pistol in his hand came rushing through the thick growth of brush.

"Give it to 'em, boys," he commanded through grim-set teeth.

One by one the enemy marksmen were being discovered and brought down by the excellent aim of the plainsmen.

"They're giving it to us pretty hot," ejaculated the young lieutenant who had now assumed command of the company. "Where's Sergeant Van Alstyne?"

To a man, the soldiers stopped firing and looked about, but the Easterner was not to be seen. The unanimous verdict was that he had retreated under fire. Whiskey Tunk laughed sarcastically.

"I knowed he'd do it; I knowed he'd do it," he insisted, wisely. "Th' tenderfoot's gone home to his mammy. He never did grow whiskers, chaw terbacker and swear like other real men."

A bullet penetrating the vitals of another trooper aroused the fighting blood of the men once more and Van Alstyne was temporarily forgotten. They lost all sense of discretion; some rose to their feet and ad-

vanced several paces, exposing themselves unduly and augmenting the list of casualties.

Gardy crawled rapidly forward on his hands and knees in his eagerness to obtain sight of another of the enemy. A bullet struck a tree beside him and he involuntarily swayed to one side. Looking up to see if anyone witnessed his act of timidity, he wormed on several yards in advance of any of his comrades. A small open space was reached, and through the foliage ahead of him he caught a glimpse of the butternut coat of a Spaniard perched upon the fan-shaped branches of a date palm. He was about to train the sight of his carbine on the object, when, to his astonishment, a short distance to his left, he perceived the familiar colors of the American uniform stretched out among the bushes—the form of a trooper, lying face downward in the moss, as if Nature, in its sympathy, had placed a verdured pillow underneath it.

There was something about the stillness of the object that caused him to bring down his gun and crawl over to where the martial figure lay. He turned the body over, face upward. The Arkansawyer shuddered. The body lay in a pool of its own blood, the eyes were grotesquely glassed, and the refined, clean-cut features were pale in death. It was Sergeant Van Alstyne.

Gardy removed his hat and stood on his knees as a tear mingled with the perspiration trickling down his cheek. A lump came to his throat, and it was with considerable self-restraint that he kept from crying aloud —he was a soldier and the grim art of war demanded that he act like a soldier—but he was a man first.

"My brave bunkie," he muttered, "I reckon yo'-all

wouldn't run when they all done said yo' did. Yo' done showed 'em yo' could be a sojer even if yo'-all did pa't yo're hair in th' middle."

Then, for the first time since the battle started, Gardy realized an unusual feeling coming over him. Previously he had kept cool under fire—the baptism of a raw recruit at that—but the sight of his comrade's blood maddened him. Something within him cried out, "Revenge, revenge, revenge!"—a call that came down to him through the centuries of time, from the beginning of things, when the world was young and before man took on the veneer they call civilization. He grasped the barrel of his carbine and jumped to his feet. Everything before him became red, red, red; the earth was red; the sky was red, and even the palm leaves became erubescent. Time was moved backwards thousands of years and he became the half man-half beast of the primeval age; his brain was aflame with but the one thought, "Kill, kill, kill!" With teeth grinding, he leaped forward madly and blindly.

His lunge was retarded by a blow in the breast simultaneously with the report of a Mauser, and he fell to his knees. A feeling of nausea came over him; blood rushed from his mouth and nearly strangled him; he gripped his stomach violently. Then something warm was felt trickling down his bosom and he tore insanely at the front of his shirt; the red hues disappeared and all became dark before him as he fell face downward. Gradually the din of battle died away —he was at ease. Presently there came a rent in the darkness; it gradually enlarged, bringing to view the Southern sun shining down on an Oklahoma prairie home—there was Laura at the gate and father at the

threshold of the door. Nearer and nearer it came. How happy they were!—the war was over; he was coming home. The happy scene dissolved itself into blackness once more; the pain in his breast was excruciating; he rolled about and gurgled a groan through his blood-clogged throat; he was burning up with fever; his mouth and lips were parched; he felt himself becoming weaker, weaker, weaker, till something cool was adjusted to his lips—something invigorating was poured down his throat that seemingly brought surcease to his abdominal pain and cooled him from his fevered head to his vitals. He felt his strength returning, and with it, his senses. His eyes widened slowly; the round, shining body of a canteen could be made out as it was juxtaposed to his lips. Peering down into his face was that of a black-mustached trooper who stroked the feverish forehead tenderly with his rugged hand. The distant crack of a rifle brought to his dim mind again the scenes of the conflict. He felt that he wanted to talk—his lips started to move in the effort and the trooper stooping over him removed the canteen. A hemorrhage had to be removed from his lungs before he could speak; then he mumbled into the rugged ear that was close to his mouth:

"Have—we—done—licked—'em?"

He saw the head nod in affirmation. The light before him began to disappear again, and blacker, blacker, blacker became the perspective—

"Laura—father—" he moaned.

The pain disappeared and he felt serenely at ease. With a supreme effort he arose to his knees for the last time—

"Remembah th' Maine—"

Then a gush of blood from his lips, a struggle as if attempting to forestall the inevitable, and he fell to his face, with his hands gripping insanely at his abdomen —darkness, and then—oblivion. The soul and its clay parted.

Like the gladiator, who, dying in the arena, with outstretched hands, breathed his last words to his Caesar: *"Morituri te salutamus"*— "Dying We Salute Thee"—so did Trooper Beauregard De Forrest, whose passing thoughts were of all that he had died for—home and country—and whose last words were a salutation to all for whom he had given his life.

As the twilight of evening crept over the tropical forest as if to lay a sombre mantle over its dead, the distance echoed the notes of buglers sounding taps.

In a brief open space among the palms the forms of two men in blue and brown were stretched, but a few feet distance separating them. A detachment of a half-dozen troopers came upon them. A search was made of their clothing for mementoes that might be returned to relatives and for marks of identification. From the breast pocket of one's coat was withdrawn a purse with the gilded letters "R. V. A." embossed thereon, and within its folds, among cards and currency of various denominations, was a withered rose.

Heads were uncovered as the stout-hearted volunteers circled about the two dead comrades. Whiskey Tunk was the only one to speak.

"Boys,"—he hesitated as if something in his throat impeded his speech—"thar's the Arkansawyer hill-billy an' the carpetbagger who we all made fun of,

an' two better men never died at the front while doing their damndest."

A grave was hastily dug, and all that was mortal of Troopers Reginald Van Alstyne and Beauregard De Forrest were reverently picked up and lowered into the earth. Six soldiers with bared heads encircled the newly-made mound, then one of the number led off with the words of "Nearer My God to Thee." The basso voices of the others took up the chorus that resonated solemnly throughout the forest.

Thus the two, side by side, were covered over with the same clay—they were both Americans and had died Americans. Posterity salutes their spirits.

The next day the news was flashed to their faraway homes in the states—the reunited states for which they had given their lives—bringing alike grief and sorrow to the palatial Fifth Avenue mansion and sorrow and grief to the humble Oklahoma prairie cottage.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SCENE IN THE BALLROOM

THE meadow lark and the oriole had but taken on their nocturnal sleep and the night hawk was tracing figures on the fast ascending shades. From the dark blue of the east the ethereal color gradually greened to the zenith, the diminuent continuing westward to where the sky was stained with alternate purple and orange billows with a golden fringe where the sun had disappeared beneath the prairie—the lord of day who, during the summer evenings was loth to relinguish his sceptre to the forces of night. In the occident heavenly bodies were appearing, one after another, out of the ocean of blue-green—timidly at first—like modest mermaids venturing to the smooth surface of the sea. Blending with the color harmony of eventide was the rhythm of the waltz, the two-step and the schottische transported on the cool night-breezes like multi-colored roses floating listlessly over ripples on the stream of floral melody—the music from Ossineke's ballroom where the young elite of the town were indulging in one of their informal events that were not dispensed with even during the heated term.

Resplendent in semi-décolleté evening gowns of chic design, the young belles of Ossineke's exclusive set (for the town was now putting on metropolitan airs) as they danced with gallants among whom was an occasional one attired in full dress, made the multitudinous colors and musical sounds doubly harmonious and pleasing. And Patti Shanks was not among the least bizarre.

Patti and Jack Morrison had long been the recognized leaders of the younger set. It was they who invariably led the grand march; it was they whose advice was always sought—in fact, no ball was considered complete without their presence. And the recent exposure of Jack Morrison had not affected his social standing in the least; he was there, suave, and as profuse with his handshakes as ever. Society, as before, condoned.

Following a two-step, the crowd gathered in knots about the hall, the young ladies vigorously fanning themselves while the male portion withdrew handkerchiefs and wiped away large drops of perspiration. At times couples would leave the group and race toward a nearby window, skating on their shoe soles to where the draught of a lower temperature offered relief. Other pairs sought the punch bowl in one corner where two little maidens in seraphim attire dispensed the cool liquid. Laughter met laughter; retort met retort in the *esprit* of repartée, and a buzz of social conversation prevailed on the floor, while on the stage, a diminutive fellow with a German name was twisting at one of the keys of his instrument that the tension of the "A" string might attune itself to a similar tone on the piano.

A dark-haired girl tripped up to the footlights, unpinned a flower from her waist and tossed it to the violinist.

"A little faster, please, next time," she pleaded.

The musician thanked her, laid the flower to one side and resumed tuning his imitation Strad.

Later a light-haired damsel with a winsome smile,

offered the orchestran a similar bribe as she stepped up to the stage.

"A trifle slower next time, please," she insisted.

He expressed his thanks, mechanically, placed the flower beside the other and resumed the adjustment of his instrument. He would play the following number to suit himself and himself alone. He drew the bow across the catgut a stroke or two, ran a few notes up and down the "E" string, and finally announced to the other musicians that all was ready.

The three-four time of a waltz started, in perfect meter. One couple arose, their feet catching the tempo of the music before they started to whirl; then others, as if waiting for someone to take the initiative, followed, till the floor resembled an eddy within which were eddies twirling about, the scintillating jewels on shirt fronts and necklaces alternately concealing and disclosing themselves like the trifling of the sun with a sylvan pool.

The dance was at its height and every face shone with the joy of adolescent abandon. All were in the best of spirits; all animosities were forgotten—it was the joyous hour of young manhood and womanhood.

The circuit of the ballroom had been made once, twice, three times in the measured dip of couples seemingly in obeisance to the deity of Juvenescence.

A young man with his hat in his hand entered and dodged his way through the pleasure entranced circle to the stage. His features were not lit up with the gaiety of the occasion; he neither smiled nor spoke to anyone who recognized him. No color flushed his boyish face; there was intense earnestness in his eyes. When near the stage he picked the floor manager from

the tangent of shuffling pumps and called him to one side. The manager, after a whispered conversation with him, stepped up onto the stage, spoke something into the violinist's ear, and the music stopped. The dancing ceased; maidens clung to the young men's arms, and all looked expectantly toward the stage where the manager stood with one hand uplifted.

Everyone was keyed up to a high nervous tension; it was war time and all looked for the latest news with tense expectancy. What was he going to announce? Had Dewey's feat been duplicated in Cuban waters? Had American arms achieved a glorious victory on Cuban soil? What had the Oklahoma boys done? Gradually the buzz simmered down to sombre stillness.

Yes, the Southwesterners had won a battle! The manager announced the victory; it had just come over the wire to Ossineke's new daily paper. The ballroom guests gave way to cheering and a sea of handkerchiefs rippled. But wait—

The speaker's hand went up again. Silence once more reigned. That was not all. The regiment had been ambushed, and the lives of some of its best men went out in the far-away tropics—the first of the American expeditionary force to drench the Cuban soil with their blood. The entire list of casualties was not available, but it was known that Trooper Beauregard De Forrest, son of Colonel Johnson De Forrest, was among the dead!

Faces blanched and deep sighs and occasional groans broke the silence. Men uttered in whisper imprecations against the enemies of their country—men who before had hesitated about enlisting became instantly imbued with a sense of revenge. Ladies

clutched tightly their escort's arms. Gradually many, with heads drooped, drifted to the seats along the side of the hall. A few of the flower of young manhood gathered in knots and discussed the news in low voice, while others sought surcease in the open windows. The atmosphere of joy had given place to that of depression.

The musicians remained in their seats as if awaiting further orders. Presently the gathering recovered and conversations were resumed. The orchestra leader, however, was about to encase his violin when one of the more frivolous young men leaped toward him and bellowed:

"Let's go ahead and dance."

"Let's dance," echoed another of his kind, and the violinist hesitated.

Jack Morrison and Patti Shanks were standing near an open window. The banker's features were pallid. The insistence of the youth for further dancing prompted Patti to smile and make waltz-like motions with her feet; she was eager to again indulge in the terpsichorean fiesta.

But not so with Jack. Leaving her, he leaped to the stage; his personality immediately commanded attention.

"There will be no more dancing tonight," he imperatively announced. "We owe it out of respect to those who have fallen in Cuba to quit right now and go home."

It was Jack Morrison speaking; it was law.

The frivolous young men grumbled, and Patti frowned, as lines were formed leading to the cloak rooms.

The gathering disbanded, and once out on the street, the events of the evening became the subject of conversation between Jack and Patti. The minister's daughter was considerably perturbed because the dance was not allowed to proceed. And Jack was not in a mood to be chided.

Couples that had accompanied them on the way home were bidden good night as they started off in other directions, leaving Patti and Jack within a block of the North Jerusalem parsonage. Then it was that the quarrel started. Patti was pertinacious.

"I certainly could see no harm in continuing the dance," she said; "we couldn't help matters in Cuba by stopping, though I'll admit it was sad news."

"Patti," returned the banker, "we certainly could not alter the situation in Cuba by ceasing to dance, but I, for one, couldn't go ahead and enjoy the evening with the thought in my mind that our boys lie buried in distant graves. I tell you it got me when I heard the news."

"But why should it get you? You have no relatives in the regiment; why should you worry?"

The Only Daughter was callous in her attitude.

"Why should I worry? Why, Patti, I'm surprised at you and the way you talk. Haven't you any feelings?"

The street light revealed a gleam of resentment in her eyes.

"Don't you think I have, Mr. Morrison? Don't you think I have an ounce of sentiment?"

The banker well understood her inference. They reached the gate and she stepped within.

"Miss Shanks," the banker spoke, reprovingly, "I'm

surprised at the way you have acted and talked this evening; I certainly expected more of you."

The young lady's temper was now feverish; she breathed rapidly.

"Mr. Morrison," she interrupted, "you needn't take on any responsibility for my actions; I'll attend to that myself."

"Then attend you may, from now on."

Jack leaned on the gate post and puffed nonchalantly from his cigar which he had just lighted.

"Patti," he continued, weighing each word, "it has came to the parting of the ways with us. I plainly see that your ideals and mine are widely at variance. There was a time when we were companionable, but that was when I was living the old life. I have seen a new light, and while from now on we can be good friends, I'm willing to forget the past except for the pleasant times we have had together and the pleasant evenings I have spent at your home. I have thought the matter over for some time, and concluded we'd better quit now while it's easy. Are you willing, Pat?" He extended his hand.

Patti hesitated and bit her lower lip. She stamped her foot on the sidewalk; the petulant blood rushed to her cheeks. Then the impulsiveness of her real self overcame all sense of tact and discretion.

"Well," she finally snapped, "if it's another you love, Mr. Morrison, your plan is perfectly agreeable to me."

The hand of Morrison remained extended.

"I love none—er—not as I know of, but I know we can never agree; your ideals and mine are different. Let's shake hands and still be good friends."

The dainty, artistic fingers were advanced, slowly. Jack felt their soft, warm touch, and he enclosed them tenderly. He held them as he looked into her brown eyes—they, too, were soft and tender; the fire of irritability had died out. As the clasp of the velvet fingers lingered, a hundred scenes were cinematographed before him—scenes of many episodes of pleasure the two had indulged in—the several months of close friendship which must cease. A feeling of remorse came over him. Was he making a mistake? No? While Patti was magnetic, there was an invisible counter-magnetism of greater tension—he knew not what—that was drawing him away from her. His hand let loose the dainty fingers. His hat was removed.

"Good-night, Patti," he bade her as he turned about to leave.

He hesitated for a moment, awaiting a reply, but none came. Instead Patti remained fixed, as if she were a carved thing attached to and a part of the gate post, only her rapid, emotional breathing indicating one of flesh and blood.

Then he slowly and hesitatingly started down the sidewalk, still carrying his hat in his hand. When about a block away he donned his hat, walked sidewise for a few steps and glanced back over his shoulder.

The handsomely gowned figure was not erect as when he had left, but instead, Patti's handkerchief covered her eyes and she leaned prostrate over the wicket. From out of the calmness of the night he heard muffled sobs.

And Jack retired to his room to toss about in a sleepless night.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CYCLONE

A FORTNIGHT had passed since the soul-rending news of Gardy's death reached the De Forrest home. It had left Laura and her father prostrate with grief—a grief only alleviated by the whole-souled sympathy of the South-western community. Condolences were profuse, and the humble home, continually from morning to night of each day, received callers—people from every walk of life, who came to share the family's sorrow as well as in the community pride that one of its sons had made the supreme sacrifice. Special services were held in the South Jerusalem church, at which all the clergy presided, and a eulogy of the life and character of the young man was the theme.

Though unknown to the De Forrests, the most lavish of the floral offerings—the mute angels of mercy—were the donations of Jack Morrison, he having wired to Wichita for the best obtainable. The banker was behind every move to bring comfort to the sorrowing family.

With Laura, her brother's death had been almost unbearable. The two weeks of bitterness had made her wan and haggard; the fascinating gleam in her eyes had disappeared and her features became ghostly in deep contrast to her wavy hair of jet black. Tears failed to come any more; the fountain of grief had dried and instead, there was a stolid self-resignation on her part which was but a veneer to the pangs still burning underneath.

The father, equally sensitive, bore up like a true

soldier. True, he wept when the first news was received. Then came a feeling of pride commingling with that of sorrow—the young man was his only son; what greater sacrifice could he make? It was hard, but was not Gardy a true De Forrest?

Jack Morrison retired to his room at a late hour one night after ascertaining if he could be of any more assistance to the bereaved family. He had called at the home more than once, and in the cold, matter-of-fact way bred into a man of the world, tendered his sympathy. It was not the lack of feeling within him, but the lack of power of expression.

He threw off his coat, walked to the window and looked out over the little city. The town was seemingly quieter than usual, as if the lugubrious pall still lingered. There were a few men lounging about on the street below, but their babble was low and subdued—even sounding faint beside the yip-yip-yip of the coyotes on the nearby prairies. The night was depressingly torrid.

Presently the moon rose in the east in all its fullness, casting a mantle of silver over the vapid world, and with it came a slight breeze from the South that played with the lace curtains overhanging Jack's shoulders. There was relief in the silvery light; there was solace in the gentle austral zephyr.

The young banker imbibed freely of the cool air. The strata of blue smoke seemingly battled with the incoming breeze for egress from the room as if aware of its polluted inferiority in the presence of the unsullied atmosphere of the prairies.

The glittering lunar shafts that pierced the

morose cloud overhanging the town likewise disintegrated the pall that held Jack in morbid suspense. He felt a rejuvenation. The warm blood of a man in the twenties surged to his extremities; he felt the tingle in the ends of his fingers, in the ends of his toes and in his brain.

"Poor girl," he thought; it certainly must be hard for her to lose her brother. And she was alone in the world with no one but her crippled father. He could help them out financially, but that would offend their pride—they would resent it. Somehow those sweet, innocent features continually arose before him in his dreams; they seemed to supplant everything else. What was he to do?

Jack left the window and paced back and forth over the rug, stopping only to flip the ashes from his havana. The elements of his soul were at war; the forces of Eros and Mammon were in battle array, now advancing, now receding; the result meaning a turning-point in his life. The spark that smouldered within his soul and which twinkled through its windows when he first met Laura De Forrest was taking on new life. It found ready kindling in his virile mind and body—the mind and body of a man in his prime. He felt a queer and unusual sensation coming over him; it seemed that his nerve centers tingled with a new vital fluid; his pace back and forth became faster and faster; his heart beat with alacrity and the red blood in his veins ran warmer than ever before. He felt like a man in the first stages of intoxication.

Once more he went to the window and looked up at the moon whose rays disclosed in his features the New Light. Even the lunar orb seemingly smiled and

the down-town lights blinked merrily. He felt happy —happier than he had ever felt in his life. There was now no sorrow in the little city; everything seemed to radiate joy. The prayers he had sent from his heart up to her God to regenerate him had been answered. He was no longer unclean, unclean.

The red blood left his heart in greater volume than ever until it became plethoric in its vessels. Nothing could stop him now! He would do anything in the world for her; he would *die* for her!

He threw himself into a chair, clasped his hands to his breast and gazed upward as if seeking still higher ideals. His heart action became more accelerated and his handsome, blonde features beamed with the emotions of the new vision; the forces of Eros had triumphed; the smouldering spark had at last set him afire.

"I love her!" he exclaimed, still looking upward at the cloud of blue smoke which, to him, outlined the features of a sweet-faced maiden.

And he reached forward with his hands and drew the phantom thing to his breast.

"Ah, the devil! It's nothing but a little storm," grumbled Jack Morrison as he rolled over on his side, buried his head in the pillow and attempted to resume his slumber.

The moonlight had given place to an ebonized vault, save flickers of light made at intervals by lightning bolts. The velocity of the wind increased as it whistled weirdly through the telephone wires and caused the lace curtains overhanging the window to dance a ghost dance. Instantaneous with the light-

ning flashes came crashes of thunder, causing a seismic rumble as if the earth were being bombarded by an invading host from distant parts of the great solar system.

"That must have hit close," muttered Jack, as one detonation of Thor's hammer was simultaneous with an electric flash.

Faster and faster the wind blew. Jack attempted to sleep, but Morpheus was evidently on duty elsewhere. He finally arose, closed the window, then returned to his feathers. Lightning strokes became more frequent; the thundering was now a continual roar and the wind became a hurricane. Drops of rain were hurled against the window panes like a fusillade of bullets. The building swayed. Then in the midst of the pandemonium among the elements, the smokestack on the electric light plant went to the ground with a crash; the force of the increasing gale caused the window glass in the street below to give way and add to the hideous din the rattling of broken panes.

Jack now took the matter seriously. He leaped from the bed and went to the window and opened it. By the intermittent lightning shafts he descried forms in the street, hurrying and scurrying for cellars and other places of shelter. From the sidewalk below the window came the sharp cry of a man signalling the warning:

"A cyclone!"

"Cyclone, the devil!" Jack answered back. "I've lived in Kansas too long not to know a 'cy' when I see it; but it's pretty wild just the same."

But the word "cyclone," nevertheless, startled him; it awakened within his mind visions of the early even-

ing—the great love dream. A mile away, on the unprotected prairie, was a frail building that contained all in the world to him—even more than his worldly possessions. As the forces outside, created as a part of the great scheme in the beginning of things, whistled and roared derisively, there appeared before him the perspective of a little cottage crumbling before their merciless onslaughts. His decision was immediate; he thoughtlessly attempted to turn on the lights, but the only available electric fluid was being shot from the clouds. By the light of these fire-bolts he succeeded in dressing himself, then plunged out the door and down the stairs.

As he reached the sidewalk the wind swept his hat from his head and carried it off into the darkness like a feat of legerdemain. The rain was not falling in torrents but was swept along in blanket-like waves as if the floodgates of all above had been opened. The wind splashed it in Jack's face and blinded him; it flowed in rivulets at his feet. He bent his head forward and faced the gale like a vessel in a storm at sea. He made headway with difficulty, and at times the charges of the elements forced him back a pace or two. The lightning as it zig-zagged through the clouds like a hydra-headed, fiery serpent revealed naught but sheets of rain and water ankle-deep ahead of him; then after each flash he would butt blindly into the blackened space.

The rain drenched Jack, and once a gust of wind, apparently one of the giants of the opposing forces, lifted him from his feet and threw him into the mud. He regained his standing posture immediately, oblivious to the smear of clay on his natty clothes. Fight-

ing his way, inch by inch, against the barrage of water and air, he reached the outskirts of the town; but yet there was a long stretch between him and his objective. Though young and wiry, the banker was feeling the effects of over-exertion. He paused to regain his breath, but the thought that the little De Forrest home might have been toppled over gave him renewed energy.

Soon he noticed the air pressure before him losing its force; the wind was subsiding and traveling was accomplished with less effort. The rain finally ceased and the wind quieted down to a slight breeze; then came a rent in the clouds through which penetrated the virgin moon. To the westward drifted the storm cloud, still waving electric flashes as if signaling a heliographic farewell, but the thundering was now only a distant rumble.

Jack felt a sense of relief in the passing of the storm, but he continued to walk at a fast pace—his objective was not yet in sight. Perhaps, after all, everything may be all right, he assured himself.

Presently by the light of the distant Jovian darts and the round moon he discerned the little cottage still intact. The gilded rays disclosed lines of joy in his features as he stopped to wipe the moisture from his face and from under his collar. While he hesitated, the last cloud had disappeared and the night became sultry once more. Not a blade of yellow grass stirred—it was one of the pranks of the Southwestern climate.

No other direction but that ahead of him could Jack think of proceeding. In that little cottage lived the one who had become his idol; he must at least see

her and express his concern about her, even at that late hour. How glad he was that the frail structure still remained standing!

He withdrew a cigar from his vest pocket; he attempted to light it, but every match in his possession was water-logged. Throwing the weed away with an oath, he resumed the journey, splashing the muddy water under his feet. When within but a few yards of the gate, he felt a slight breeze fanning his warm, blonde cheeks. In his saturated clothing it made him feel chilly. There was a roaring noise in the distance. The presence of an air current caused him to pause and instinctively search the heavens for a cloud. In every direction he gazed, until in the southwest there loomed up above the horizon the terror of the Middle West—a funnel-shaped cloud, graduating in size from the earth until it spread out over a good portion of the heavens. He shuddered as he watched it tearing across the distant plains, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake. Overcome with awe, Jack stood motionless. He was glad it was not coming his way.

But at that moment the hideous thing changed its course, heading straight toward him with the velocity of a comet! The De Forrest cottage was in the path of the oncoming, roaring demon!

"My God!" gasped Jack and he leaped forward. Could he save her before the thing struck? And there was her crippled father, too!

Louder and louder became the roar, like the bellowing of some unearthly monster. On and on it came. The dark, dismal, threatening thing leaned far forward as it advanced.

Jack summoned all the energies of his youth in the

race—a race between a dragon bent on destruction and a knight bent on saving.

"I hope they've seen it and taken to the cave," he gasped.

He stumbled and fell into the mud, and when he had regained his feet the moon had disappeared behind a cloud. By the light of the distant electric fluid being issued from the west he saw the acute angle of the cloud nearing the house. With teeth firmly set, he was about to leap through the gate when the sight he beheld caused an icy chill to creep over him, seemingly freezing the blood in his veins and paralyzing his muscles. Then for the first time in his life Jack Morrison sent up an audible invocation to heaven.

"Oh, God—her God—save her!' he implored, then as he recovered his vitality plunged madly into the roaring maelstrom. On all sides of him whirled missiles of every description, and all he could hear was a crashing, tearing, crunching, roaring inferno. He was being swept from his feet and sucked into the eddy when something in the whirlpool struck him a violent blow on the head, a myriad of stars sputtered before him—and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GREAT HEART TRAGEDY

HEN Jack Morrison opened his eyes he was lying in a pool of water. He raised himself on his elbow, and as he did so, he felt his warm blood trickle down the side of his face. The moon was shining brightly; there was not a breath of air stirring, nor a cloud in the sky. He crawled out of the puddle and gradually felt his strength returning. He recollected dreamily all that had happened; he scanned the prairie for the cottage, but none was to be seen in the silvered perspective. He staggered to his feet; his head was throbbing with pain.

"Where am I?" he asked himself. He supposed he had been carried a considerable distance by the cyclone. "And where are they?"

He was yet weak and dazed and stumbled instinctively in the direction of the moon.

Presently, from a nearby cotton field came deep moaning and lamenting. Even in his semi-comatose condition the voice sounded familiar to Jack. With each step in that direction his strength and vitality returned. Among the prostrate cotton vines he discovered a form in white stooping over another form and wailing broken-heartedly.

Jack, as he approached the weeping girl, recognized the wealth of black that rippled over her shoulders and hung annoyingly about her face. He advanced cautiously, and the scene he beheld made him faint and sick—it was Laura De Forrest stooping over the lifeless form of her father. The girl fortunately had escaped with but a few trifling bruises.

Jack stood for a moment, his arms folded, silent and transfixed, while she continued her lamentations; she did not realize another was present.

"Laura."

The words came softly from trembling, sympathizing lips. The startled girl arose to her feet, shaking like one with the chills.

"Don't be afraid; it is me."

She recognized the voice; there was something soothing in the words. He advanced toward her; she was still trembling.

"Oh, Lord" she moaned, as she buried her head in her folded arms; "what am I to do?"

"Just leave that to me," soothed Jack, as he extended his hands forward in an attempt to draw her to him.

She recoiled with a shudder, and, raising one hand protested:

"You?" Her breathing was rapid and violent. "Don't—don't yo' come neah me."

But the young Kansan was insistent. He stepped forward slowly and imprisoned both of her hands with his. She could feel his steady, rhythmic heart-beat. She felt a drop of blood—his blood—fall from his wounded head upon her cheek and blend its crimson with the streams of grief.

"Laura," he spoke, softly, "since the storm first started my only thought was of you and of saving you. I was at the gate and saw the twister hit your house before I could reach you; then I was knocked senseless and didn't know any more until just before I heard your voice. Laura, tell me, are you hurt in any way? Can I help you?"

Pride again sustained her even in her greatest heart trial. There was a discernable flash beneath the tear-films in her eyes.

"You—help me?" she returned, her head thrown back. "It was shore good of yo'-all to try to save we-uns, Mr. Mo'son, but I—I'm all right. I don't need yo're help." Then turning about she gazed upon the lifeless visage of her father. "But there is daddy—my poor daddy." So overcome was she that Jack was compelled to summon all his fast returning strength to support her. He removed his coat and covered up the blood-stained, lifeless features.

"Never mind, girl," he spoke, consolingly; "you simply *must* come with me and I'll see that your father is attended to later."

So saying he attempted to lead her away from the heart-rending scene. She was at first obstinate, then, with Jack's support, trudged at his side through the field of fallen cotton vines, listening to his consoling words on the way until they reached the road leading to town.

The dawn of a new day was giving the eastern horizon a variegated tint. The brush of morn was staining the earth-edge of the oriental sky with an orange hue that was fast encroaching upon the light green above into which the stars were disappearing like lucent dancers receding from the nightly stage of life's drama. The moon, in deference to the greater light, was withdrawing its silvered legions from out of the east and was westering toward the earth's rim that it might not pale before the majesty of the sun. The twilight was painting the prairies from the tubes of the heralding orange—a twilight without cloud-veil or

haze of gray to hide its chastity. From out of its nest and flitting aross the road chirped a meadow lark and on the slight morning breeze was wafted the sonata of the mocking bird in prelude to the whistling cadences of the oriole and the "bob-white!" of the quail.

The two stopped for a moment in their tracks while Laura temporarily arranged her dishevelled hair and dried her tears with his handkerchief. Then, between sobs, the girl spoke:

"Mr. Mo'son, yo'-all have been a good, kind man—it was so brave of yo' t' make an effort t' save we'-uns—"

"Don't thank me," interrupted the young lover; "I was only too glad to—" He hesitated. She stared.

"I was only too glad to—" he gasped again. The forces of Eros were all-powerful. He felt the thrill of his life; he could not resist the impulse of his soul any longer, thoughtless as he was—blindly thoughtless of her present agony. He quickly turned and faced her, seized both her arms and gazing with sincere eyes into her startled features, exclaimed, the words emanating from the very depths of his being:

"Laura—I love you! Will you be mine?"

His eyes gleamed devotedly and pleadingly as he drew her to him. She felt herself, for a moment, giving way to him in abandon, and then, adroitly turning to one side, she gazed stolidly in an opposite direction as if for an instant meditating. Then she abruptly broke away from him and stepped to one side.

"Mr. Mo'son, don't talk that way," she spoke reprovingly. "I cannot listen to that kind of talk."

"But," interposed the man, surprisedly—"tell me, what can I do for you to make you happy?"

"I must leave you at once, Mr. Mo'son." She started off by herself down the road.

"But, Laura—" Jack followed her beseechingly. She hesitated without turning about to face him. She shook her head negatively.

"Laura," he continued, "I know I'm not worthy of you, but I can't live without you—I want to share your troubles—to make your God my God—it is all I desire in the world other than your love—"

The girl turned about slowly. There was an unmistakable firmness in her otherwise sad eyes and a tautening of her lips.

"It's not that," she half whispered. "I cannot."

"Why—?"

"Yo'-all are a Jayhawker."

Jack's arms fell to his side and a perturbed, crestfallen look spread over his face. And then:

"Laura, are your words final?"

"They shore are, Mr. Mo'son."

Early morn after the storm found scores of people of Ossineke up and moving about, viewing the wreckage and vigilantly in search of any who might be killed or injured. Outside of minor damages done to the buildings, the town itself showed but little effects of the heavy wind, but a well-swept path along the little city's outer edge indicated plainly the destructive force of the cyclone that crushed the De Forrest cottage. Among the casualties a half-dozen were killed and a score injured. Otherwise, the property destruction

was quite extensive as the twister had swept everything clean in its path.

It was in knowing the death-dealing propensities of a storm of this kind that prompted many to be up and about early. Among the many who started to search out the injured and dead at sun-up were the Reverend and Mrs. Charles Shanks, and so it happened they rode in their carriage along the road leading in the direction of the De Forrest homestead.

The reverend gentleman reined his horse as he encountered a young couple in the road moving toward town.

"My heavens, Mr. Morrison, what has happened to you?" anxiously inquired the pastor, as he recognized Jack, in spite of the banker's much bruised head and face.

"And you, Miss De Forrest!" spoke up the minister's wife, excitedly, before Jack could reply to the Reverend Shanks' succint interrogation; "is there anything wrong? Where is your father? Is your home destroyed?"

Mrs. Shanks tremblingly awaited a reply.

Laura's tell-tale features drooped; she attempted to speak, but the words only arose in her throat unuttered. Jack kept his eyes on the ground, but finally managed to say in the girl's behalf, slowly and with deep feeling:

"Yes, he is dead."

"Oh, you dear little girl!" screamed the minister's wife. With a leap she left the carriage and instantly drew Laura's head to her breast, pouring upon the girl tears of commiseration. Then, holding Laura at arm's length, intermittent with sobs, she smiled adoringly.

"Laura," she said, kindly; "you're our girl now; you simply must come and live with us. You're our daughter," and as if to seal her resolution, planted a kiss on the girl's anguish-lined cheek.

"Yes," added the Reverend Shanks, feelingly, "you must come to our house—we have adopted you from now on as ours."

As she was assisted into the carriage and rode away with the North Jerusalem minister and his wife, Laura was too dazed to realize her new position fully, or if she did realize, failed to find words to express her appreciation.

Jack walked to town, and upon arriving, made the necessary arrangements for the funeral of the late Colonel Johnson De Forrest, then retired to his apartments and locked the door.

The excitement of the early morning in Ossineke gave way to an air of lugubriousness as the day wore on. The entire town was depressed and in mourning; little business was done, and consequently Jack Morrison's absence was not noted.

The banker remained in morbid seclusion all day, not venturing forth even to his meals—for how could material things satisfy one's soul craving? Throughout the long hours he dreamed and smoked and dreamed and smoked. The cyclone might have left many homes over which the pall of death hung—it might have left many hearts broken, but no cataclysm could have been more destructive and deadly to him than the words insistent in his memory:

"Mr. Mo'son, I cannot. Yo' are a Jayhawker."

The great storm was insignificant, he thought; it was but in a minor way correlative to the real great

tragedy in which he alone felt the victim. No altar ever received richer offerings than he had made in her behalf; no suffering so keen that he did not readily sustain for her, even facing death itself. And he would gladly do it again—even more—for he loved her with all the sweet passion of his youth and as only youth can love. It was a devotion that he had vowed to Heaven was as pure and unsullied as the girl herself. As he paced backward and forward and smoked incessantly, his mind was transported reminiscently over the past in search of any wrongs he might have done her, and while they might have been trivial, was he not ready and willing to more than right them? And as he thought and pondered insanely all day long over his rejection, he became hypochondriacal. There was no just God, he concluded, who would instil within one the heavenly desire to love Her, to worship Her, to serve Her and even die for Her, and have that love go down through life without response on Her part, only to wither in later years like the mistletoe before the frost-laden breath of autumn—but no. He would not have it that way. It would not wither and die in the autumn of his life; it would blossom forth even unto death; yes, it was immortal; it would never die, for even if he were to die, it would be wafted onward beyond the grave to that great pure spirit land incessantly in search for Her. But, then, he cogitated, is there a hereafter? Is there a God? He shook his head negatively. The whole scheme of things was wrong. Even in this life, what of the future without Her? Just a dismal, vapid existence, without form and void, even if he continued to prosper materially and gain the whole world. And as eventide approached after a day

of agony, he stood leaning with one hand on the table. With the other he opened a drawer and grasped the handle of a revolver. Death, alone, he concluded, would be a solace. Religion was rot; there was no God and he cared not for his soul. Death would end all. But how? Had he the courage to end his own existence? The echo of a newsboy's cry diverted his attention, even startling him after hours of stillness:

"Extray! Santiago has fallen!"

The Anglo-Saxon in his passion for world democracy had again triumphed as at Manila Bay and Las Quasimas. Excited crowds gathered on the sidewalks. In knots they formed and in a moment the tragedies of the night previous were forgotten. Soon the evening air was resonant with wild cheers and hurrahs. Not satisfied, the town band was summoned to add to the din.

Jack, however, paid little attention to the excitement, until the band was passing, when he stepped to the window. As his head protruded between the lace curtains, the musicians brassed exultingly the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The banker's ear, supposed to be deadened to all that is sentimental, caught the air of the inspiring anthem and instantly there occurred to him the words—he could not recollect when he had learned them in the past, but nevertheless they had been stored subconsciously within the recesses of his memory. As the band played, there burst forth in his mind, in tempo with the tune:

"In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born
across the sea
With that glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.

As He died to make men holy, so we'll die to
make men free
While God is marching on.

"Yes," he mused, "die to make men free." And if he *must* die—if life held no more charms for him, why not die for a purpose? Rather, he thought, his body rot in the tropical jungles than to live the life it seemed that he was destined to live.

The conclusion he came to was immediate. He tossed the gun back into the drawer, and by telephone, summoned his cashier to come at once.

The cashier arrived instantly and gasped as Jack placed a document in his hands.

"Why, er—" he was about to say—

"Never mind asking any questions," interrupted the banker; "I'm in a hurry to catch the next train. This paper appoints you my attorney to transact all business in my behalf, and should anything happen to me, there are papers in the vault telling what disposition to make of my property. Good-bye."

Abruptly giving his employe a farewell handshake, Jack hurriedly packed his grip and started for the station.

The next morning, in Oklahoma City, he arose early, ate a light breakfast and wandered down Broadway until the flag that he sought, hanging suspended from a window, attracted his attention. It was the symbol of the United States Army recruiting station.

Jack lost no time in presenting himself, passed a creditable physical examination and was sent hurriedly across the continent to Chickamauga where he was mustered into immediate service as a private in khaki.

CHAPTER XXXI

REGENERATED PATTI

ATTI SHANKS left the veranda of the parsonage and moved toward the figure gowned in sombre black and seated underneath the spreading young oak in the lawn. She walked slowly and quietly until her hand was about to rest on the shoulder of the one in mourning, when she spoke, softly:

"Sister—"

Laura De Forrest started tremblingly and quickly arose.

"Oh!" she gasped, "Patti, deah, yo'-all frightened me."

Patti laughed.

"You shouldn't be so nervous," and after an affectionate embrace suggested that they be seated. Then, in a vis-a-vis, the minister's daughter continued:

"Laura, dear, what can I do to make you happy? I've tried my best, but day after day, you seem to desire to be only by yourself, under this tree, and looking longingly into the distance—I know you've had your share of troubles, but is there anything more I can do for you? Can I share them with you in any way?"

Laura's eyes responded with a gleam of gratefulness as she reached up and stroked Patti's brown hair.

"Patti, it isn't that yo'-all haven't done all human beings can do for one as unfortunate as me—yo'-all have done everything to relieve me of my sorrow, but —but—"

The girl from the Ozarks turned her head to one side and gazed wistfully over the plains.

"But," insisted Patti, "I'm your sister now; I must know your troubles—I must share them with you. Tell me, Laura dear; tell me all."

Laura's eyes remained inertly fixed for a moment on the great, wide spaces, but the emotions of her soul caused her breast to rise and fall rapidly, and then:

"Patti, I know I should be happy with all the comforts your home provides, but—but—" her head fell on Patti's shoulder; she spoke in a half sob:

"Patti, I don't want yo'-all to think the less of me if I ask yo' a question?"

"No, no, sister; ask me anything."

Lifting her head and waving back an unruly lock of hair, the girl asked, hesitatingly, and evidently abashed:

"Has anyone heard from him? Does anyone know where he is?"

Patti, surprised, held the girl at arm's length, and with a keen, inquisitive expression, queried in return:

"Why, who do you mean, girlie?"

Again the foster sister faltered.

"I cannot tell yo'."

For a brief instant, the minister's daughter was dazed, and then a light finally dawned upon her. She smiled, and then about-facing and in a more serious tone, spoke feelingly:

"Laura, it's not for me—one who knows fully the sweetness of love and the keen anguish of disappointment—to question you any further. I know what it is

myself to love a man. But tell me, Laura, as your sister; tell me truly, do you sincerely love him?"

Laura merely nodded her head in affirmation.

"And is he—is he—Jack Morrison?"

The girl in black hid her face on Patti's shoulder, and then, in a coyful whisper:

"Yeah."

Patti bit her lip in her effort to suppress some inner emotion which was about to become assertive. Then, after a deep sigh, she spoke, not with her former impulsiveness, but soothingly and tenderly:

"Then why should you not be happy, Laura, for I'm sure he loves you."

"At least he's told me so."

"And he asked you to be his?"

"He shore did."

"And you declined?"

"I couldn't help it, Patti. I feel that I'm not good enough fo' him. He is rich an' eddicated, while I—while I—" she paused and wrung her hands—"while I have nuthin' in this heah world only what my friends are good enough to give me. I could not make him happy—"

"There, there," interrupted Patti; "you silly girl. It's just your Southern pride that makes you feel that way—you think that he is merely being charitable toward you because of your recent troubles, but I'm sure that isn't the case—I'm positive that he really and truly loves you."

"But where is he? Will he evah come back?"

Patti interlaced her fingers across her knee and studied the ground, meanwhile shaking her head, perplexedly.

"Nobody knows," she responded, with a deep breath. "He left town, it is said, the day after the storm and hasn't been seen nor heard from since. His cashier claims to know nothing of his whereabouts and his departure and absence during the past two weeks has been a mystery. But, even at that, Laura, I can't help but think he will return some day—he'll surely return to you."

The Southern girl's eyes brightened and the adolescent color of hope once more ascended her cheeks.

"An' do yo'-all really think he'll evah come back?" She smiled slightly.

"Laura, let us pray to God that no ill has befallen him—that is about all we can do. Now I know you'll never be happy till you see him again, but then—let's go into the house and have dinner. Don't you hear mother calling us?"

Patti arose first, assisted her adopted sister to her feet and as the two trudged off to the parsonage, arms about waists, the brown-eyed daughter of the pastor led the conversation in a happy vein.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PASSING FRONTIER

 ACK MORRISON had barely time to be initiated into ways military at Chickamauga when the news was received at camp that the war was at an end. It was welcome news to many, to others a keen disappointment, especially Jack, who had become imbued with the feeling that life on the firing line in which men toyed recklessly with Fate and stacked discs on Death's table was preferable to living out his existence at home under the most painful reverse he had ever met. If nothing more, parrying with death would be a counter-irritant to the soul pang under which he labored. But when the news of the signing of the protocol reached him, he cursed his fate, and pondered on what he should do next. He sat on a camp stool gazing at the setting sun one evening, and as the rim of the heavenly orb disappeared behind the mountain in the west he unconsciously found himself inclined to follow it, for in the west was all that he longed for in the world. In his fancy he pictured her in many scenes, and, yes—the dark eyes that first conveyed to him a message of undying affection. Yet, with his hazy past he still felt himself unworthy of her. But then, as he smoked dreamily, he finally decided to return to Ossineke! He would at least have the opportunity of feasting his eyes on her—perhaps he might have the opportunity of conversing with her and discover what the barrier was that held them apart.

While his regiment was not to be mustered out for some time, it happened that wires were kept busy

while he used his political influence in being discharged at an early date. Then it was he took the first train across the Father of Waters, through the Arkansas swamps and out onto the plains of Oklahoma. While the train lumbered along he meditated deeply. He joyed at the thought of possibly seeing her once more, and then, if she still maintained her former attitude toward him, he would dispose of his entire holdings there and leave for the mountains of the Farther West and live a recluse the remainder of his life, finding solace only in the silver-tipped peaks, the eternal evergreens and laughing cascades—there to live in a scenic garden and dream of her.

He became reminiscent of the scene of that dismal night, and the only incident he could recollect clearly was that she was taken to the home of the North church minister. And where is she now? Thrown upon her own resources, helpless and penniless? He shuddered at the thought. And as he swayed in the seat of the smoker, puffing at intervals on his cigar, many scenes were visualized before him in which she might possibly be a part, and as he pondered on what might possibly be her fate, his desire to see her grew, grew, grew until it seemed he could leave the slow-moving train and fly on the swift wings of his vision to where she was. But was she there? Surely the whole-souled people of Ossineke would take care of her and provide for her.

A dust-covered soldier in khaki, carrying a grip, leaped from the evening train as it stopped in Ossineke. In the uniform of the U. S. A. few onlookers recognized Jack Morrison, and he managed to reach his office in

the bank before his arrival had been gossiped about town to any great extent. Grasping the telephone receiver and thrusting it to his ear, he hastily called up the North Jerusalem parsonage. Patti answered; she immediately recognized his voice.

"Well, forevermore!"

"Never mind," interrupted the banker, "may I call this evening?"

"Certainly you may."

Jack found Patti sitting on the porch when he arrived at the parsonage, the Reverend and Mrs. Shanks having absented themselves on a call. Patti could not help but admire the Kansan's appearance in his natty uniform and she kept her eyes on him continually as he recited tales of his experience in the army, and she emphasized the fact that he had been greatly missed in the community. But during the entire discourse the soldier's eyes roamed searchingly in the distance for something greatly desired but could not be found. Then it was, while the conversation flowed on volubly, unnoticed by him, a sombre figure circled from the rear of the home and took its place on the settee under the young oak tree in front.

Patti, through it all, was fully cognizant of his real thoughts, and at last she ventured, laughingly:

"Jack, you seem restless—"

"Oh, no," he assured her—"just a little excited about returning, and—"

"Now, Jack—" her eyes merried—"I think you'd better go and sit under the tree for awhile and have a smoke—you'll get over your nervousness there—or else become more so—and if you'll excuse me I'll go in and prepare a lunch for us."

Jack acquiesced thankfully and as he left Patti and meandered down the steps there appeared before him a dark figure under the tree. He hesitated, briefly, lest he be intruding—was it an apparition? But recognition came to him, though darkness was becoming thick upon the prairies.

He walked up behind her, stealthily and quietly. She remained pensively studying the fast blackening infinitude and occasionally sighing. Her thoughts did not reach out into the darkened space very far when they encountered his, and so much were they psychologically in harmony that she found herself arising and facing none other than Jack Morrison, himself!

They were brief, unhesitating moments Patti passed in preparing the lunch, and what happened in the meantime, under the young oak tree, will be left to conjecture. Suffice to say: the minister's daughter stepped stealthily out onto the porch. Quietly she parted the luxuriant morning glory vines that drooped from the roof and interlaced themselves densely from column to column. The dull grayness of nightfall accentuated the distant lights, but in the immediate perspective, under the oak tree, she could but perceive two silhouettes against the star-lit vastness. There was the music of the katy-did and the humming bird, mingling with occasional laughter emanating from the settee and she caught an occasional word embellished in youthful tones of hope and joy. A slight breeze stirred the adolescent tree to join in the rhythm with a melody of leaf-ripples—stirred, it seemed, by the beating of two young hearts underneath its branches if not by the air redolent with wild honey-

suckle. How young the world was, even after these millions of years she thought, as under the oak the outlines of the two could be seen drawing to each other, nearer, nearer, nearer, until lips met for a long, long moment, and then the two silhouettes seemingly blended.

Patti smiled at the scene, underneath serious eyes —eyes from which a tear or two dropped onto the petals of a flower closed in sleep, and tears evidencing emotions that only her stronger womanhood controlled. But was not such a scene enough to cause any heart to respond happily? Yes, she loved him, but was not he happy? And what more could she desire? Her greater womanhood asserted itself—she had learned to overcome self as he had learned to overcome self. Even so, she was reluctant to disturb such a happy affair under the tree while the circling nighthawk whistled to its mate and the stars apparently blinked with greater brilliancy. At last, she startled the two by her presence, but a gentle hand on the shoulders of each was quieting, and after congratulations and felicitations, the three repaired to the dining room, where under a chandelier draped with Oklahoma mistletoe they sat, as happy a triune as ever met and lingered over a dainty meal. There they chatted reminiscently of the past and the great events through which they had passed in the metamorphosis of their lives, for had not, in the regeneration, Jack Morrison proven himself a man and Patti a real woman?

It was during the course of the conversation that Jack incidentally remarked:

"What has become of Barks, Patti?"

"Why, haven't you heard?" surprisedly returned

the minister's daughter. "Well, you see, while you were away a new chief of police was installed in office in Ossineke. He is a former U. S. marshal from Indian Territory, having been on the trail of bad men there for years. He is absolutely fearless, and believe me, Jack, he has been doing a cleaning up in this city. No more gambling and no more gun toting is his edict. In the first place, he with his force raided the gambling dens. Most of the gamblers left town, but a few defiantly remained, among them your old pal Edgar Barks. It happened one night as the chief and his force charged the Senate. As they rushed into the place, Barks, who was sitting in on a game, reached for his gun. Well, as the old timers say, 'he wasn't quick enough on the draw'; so that ended the career of Mr. Barks."

"Poor Barks," Jack spoke with a melancholy sigh; "he was such a devoted pal, but he simply would not change his ways—"

There was a noise of heavy boots on the porch outside, then a loud rap on the door. Patti arose, and stepped to the threshold, the door being partly opened.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Tunk and Mr. Kaintuck," greeted the minister's daughter.

"We came t' call on ther parson an' say good-bye t' him"; explained Tunk; "we're agoin' t' leave these here parts—"

"Going to leave?" interrupted Patti. "Sorry father is not here—"

Jack quickly recognized the voice of Wall-eyed Kaintuck. He instantly left the table and joined Patti at the door. He was followed by Laura.

"Well, if here ain't that old son-of-a-gun Jack Mor-

rison," exclaimed Whiskey Tunk. "Well, well, well! Where'n ther devil have yer been? Doin' a leetle sojerin'?"

So saying, Tunk grasped Jack's hand with a vise-like grip and whacked him over the shoulders. Kaintuck joined in the greeting in a manner equally demonstrative.

"Just a little," assured Jack, after he had recovered his breath—"but too late to see any fighting."

"But it's me what seed some fightin'" boasted Tunk—"wounded at San Juan hill so that I got a early discharge—that's why I'm here." Then giving his trousers a hitch and assuming a soldierly pose, he continued his bragging:

"Why, Jack, ye'd orter seed me an Roosyvelt leadin' that thar charge up San Juan hill—"

"Thar, thar, yer goin' again," interposed Kaintuck, as he spoke to Tunk reprovingly; "yer allus tellin' about how yer an' Teddy won the war."

As Tunk was about to turn on Kaintuck with an expression of contempt, Jack laid his hand on the arm of the veteran Rough Rider.

"Whiskey Tunk," spoke Morrison proudly, as he reached for Laura and drew her to his side, "I want you and Wall-eyed Kaintuck to meet the future Mrs. Morrison."

The lower jaws of the two old-timers sagged and for a moment they stood motionless with wide-open eyes and then:

"Congratcherlashuns, congratcherlashuns," felicitated Tunk, as he grabbed the hands of the young couple, followed by Wall-eyed Kaintuck.

"Well, well," gleefully drolled the plainsman, "and

you, Miss," added Tunk, "I knowed yer brother well"—he turned to one side and his arms hung limp—"he belonged t' my company, an' no better fightin' son-of-a-gun ever died at th' front."

There was a momentary stillness and all heads drooped as if in silent prayer. Then Tunk raised his head and again boomed:

"D' yer know, Jack, ol' pard, they've been raisin' Sam Hill 'round these here parts. No more gamblin' an' no more gun-totin'. Jes, think o' that! They've interjuced a hull lot o' new fangled, highfalutin' things like laws an' ordinances an' perleece an' sich, so me an' Kaintuck 'lowed this be no place for a real man t' live in any more. So me an' him ar a-goin' t' Alasky t' join that thar stampede t' ther Klondyke. Jus' think of it! How in Sam Hill is a gentleman a-goin' t' defend his honor of he doesn't tote a gun? I tell yer, Jack, it's hell!"

The last word was bellowed loudly and emphatically. The two ladies started. Jack's eyes merried.

Kaintuck then shuffled over to the side of his companion. In a half whisper he spoke into Tunk's ear and with his elbow hunched Tunk's ribs.

" 'Polergize, Tunk," he urged. " 'Polergize. Yer swore in front o' ther wimmen."

Whiskey Tunk gulped; his eyes rolled evasively, sheepishly. He crumpled his sombrero in his hands, and then, getting himself together, jackknifed in a low, humble bow, but with intense sincerity:

" 'Scuse me, ladies," he drawled in deep bass; "I'm allus makin' a damned fool o' myself."

Even Laura and Patti could not suppress a giggle,

and Jack was compelled to turn his back on the party and smother a laugh.

Kaintuck, his countenance advertising disgust, suggested to his companion that it was time to leave.

"Wa-all, good-bye, all ye'r," waved Tunk as the two departed, leaving Patti's party somewhat remorseful.

Whiskey Tunk and Wall-eyed Kaintuck ambled away in the fading twilight, symbols of a passing frontier.

THE END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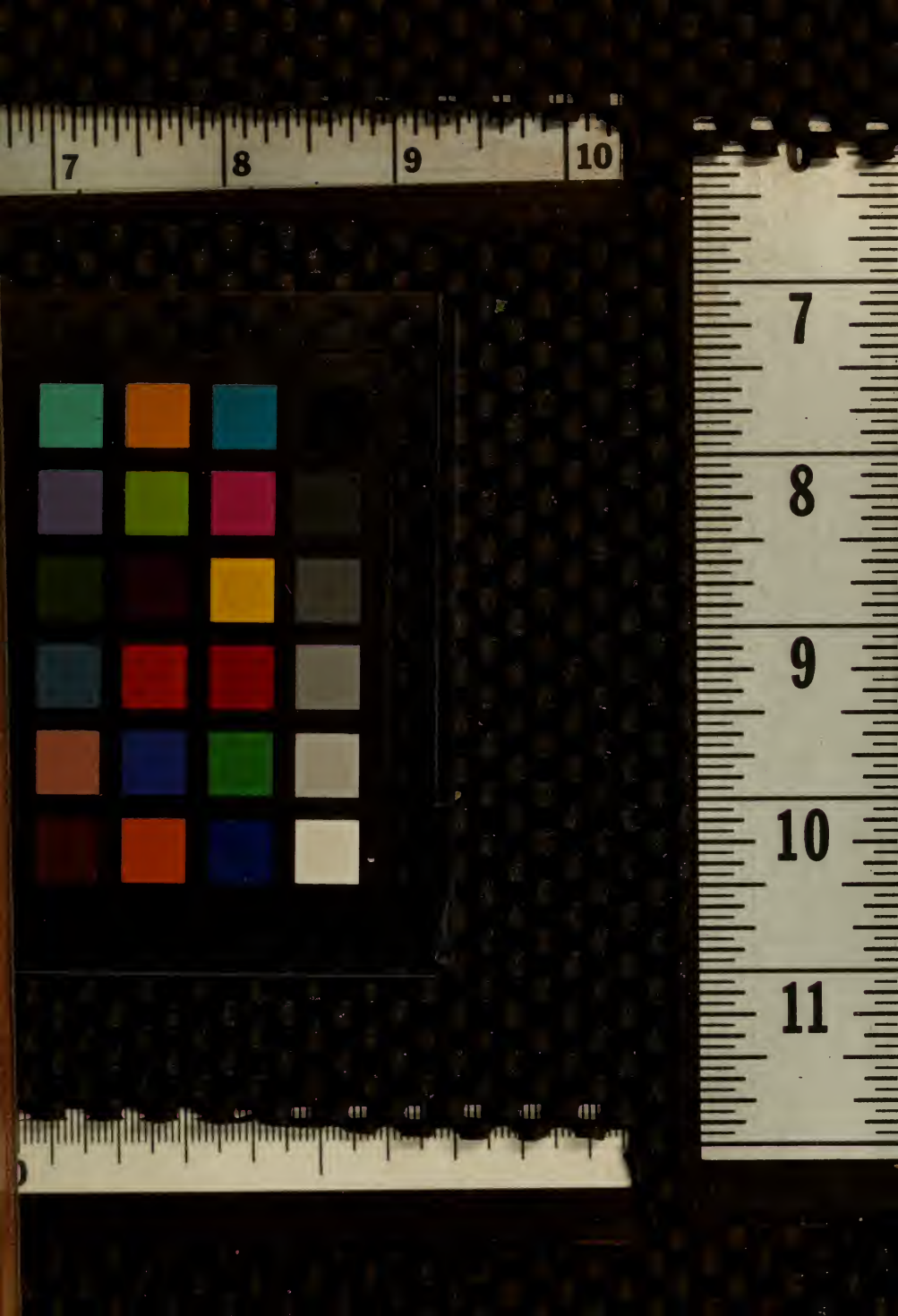
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